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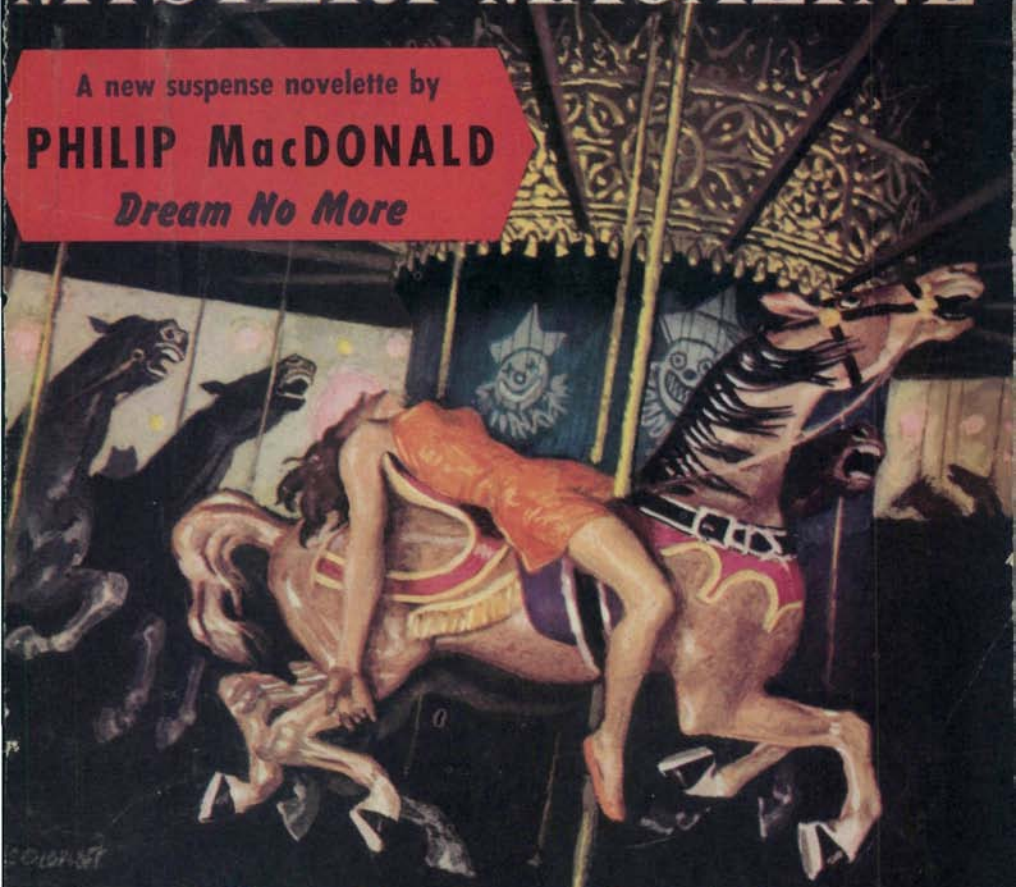

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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QUEEN'S QUORUM: 1951-1954

May we refresh your memory about Queen's greatest "labor of love"? . . . In 1951 Little, Brown and Company of Boston published "a new, revised, and expanded edition" of QUEEN'S QUORUM, *which is still "the only work of its kind in the world." The subtitle clearly indicated the book's purpose and scope — A History of the Detective-Crime Short Story as Revealed by the 106 Most Important Books Published in this Field since 1845. The slim volume — only 142 pages — contained nine chapters. The first chapter was called "The Incunabular Period," and traced the beginnings of the detective-crime-mystery short story from the Bible through Voltaire. Chapter II was titled "The Founding Father," and after clarifying the contributions of William Leggett, François Eugène Vidocq, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, came to that red-letter day in April 1841 when the world's first detective story, in the full modern sense, was born — Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Thus, Poe's* TALES *(1845) became Queen's Quorum Number 1 — the cornerstone of cornerstones, the highest of all highspots.*

Chapter III dealt with "The First Fifty Years" after Poe — with the work of such early authors in the field as "Waters," Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Mark Twain, Émile Gaboriau, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Chapter IV ushered in "The Doyle Decade," that fabulous ten years — first, Oscar Wilde and Israel Zangwill, with their important contributions, then A. Conan Doyle and the one and only Sherlock Holmes, followed by Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt, M. P. Shiel's Prince Zaleski, Nicholas Carter's famous "Nick," and E. W. Hornung's equally famous Raffles.

Chapter V raised the curtain on "The First Golden Era" — the creations in the field by Richard Harding Davis, Bret Harte, Arnold Bennett, Maurice Leblanc, Jacques Futrelle, O. Henry, Baroness Orczy, and R. Austin Freeman. Chapter VI, "The Second Golden Era," highlighted the outstanding books of G. K. Chesterton, Arthur B. Reeve, Anna Katharine Green, Ernest Bramah, Thomas Burke, Melville Davisson Post, and H. C. Bailey — about such luminaries as Father Brown, Max Carrados, Uncle Abner, and Reggie Fortune, among others.

Chapter VII — "The First Moderns" — discussed Agatha Christie, Edgar Wallace, Dorothy L. Sayers, W. Somerset Maugham, T. S. Strib-

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ling, and Harvey J. O'Higgins. Chapter VIII — "The Second Moderns" — covered Damon Runyon, Georges Simenon, Irvin S. Cobb, Ellery Queen, Margery Allingham, E. C. Bentley, John Dickson Carr, and William MacHarg. The last chapter in the book, called "The Renaissance," brought the history of the form almost up to date — with the work of Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich, Raymond Chandler, Rafael Sabatini, Roy Vickers, and William Faulkner. The final cornerstone in the book was the best volume of detective short stories published in 1950 — Queen's Quorum Number 106: Lawrence G. Blochman's DIAGNOSIS: HOMICIDE.

Now, what has happened to the detective-crime short story since 1950? Have there been any books fine enough to be nominated to QUEEN'S QUORUM? *Yes, indeed. "The Renaissance" is continuing, in full flower. As we predicted at the end of* QUEEN'S QUORUM, *"the decades to come will not fail to yield an even richer harvest, giving promise of New Golden Eras which will perpetuate the grandeur that was Poe and Post and the glory that was Doyle and Chesterton."*

In the four years between January 1, 1951 and December 31, 1954 no less than six books of detective-crime short stories have earned the right to be nominated to QUEEN'S QUORUM. *It happens that EQMM is in the position to offer you stories by all six authors involved — four brand-new stories and two reprints. So we decided to devote part of this issue to bringing* QUEEN'S QUORUM *up to date — that is, up to January 1, 1955 — and to celebrate the new selections by giving you a special group of stories by the six new members of* QUEEN'S QUORUM.

The year 1951 produced one indisputable cornerstone:

Queen's Quorum Number 107:
John Collier's
FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS
Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1951

It should be noted for the record that most of the crime stories in FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS *appeared in previous books by John Collier:* WITCH'S MONEY (*New York: Viking Press, 1940, edition limited to 350 copies signed by the author*); PRESENTING MOONSHINE (*New York: Viking Press, 1941; London: Macmillan, 1941*); *and* THE TOUCH OF NUT-

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MEG AND MORE UNLIKELY STORIES (*New York: The Readers Club, 1943*).

To represent John Collier we have chosen one of his finest tales, "De Mortuis," and in it, for all its brevity, you will find the celebrated Collier irony, wit, and bite . . . and something else: characterizations so acute that they may make you feel uneasy — as if you suddenly realized, while reading, that you were snooping or eavesdropping . . .

DE MORTUIS

by JOHN COLLIER

DR. RANKIN WAS A LARGE AND rawboned man on whom the newest suit at once appeared outdated, like a suit in a photograph of twenty years ago. This was due to the squareness and flatness of his torso, which might have been put together by a manufacturer of packing cases. His face also had a wooden and a roughly constructed look; his hair was wiglike and resentful of the comb. He had those huge and clumsy hands which can be an asset to a doctor in a small upstate town where people still retain a rural relish for paradox, thinking that the more apelike the paw, the more precise it can be in the delicate business of a tonsillectomy.

This conclusion was perfectly justified in the case of Dr. Rankin. For example, on this particular fine morning, though his task was nothing more ticklish than the cementing over of a large patch on his cellar floor, he managed those large and clumsy hands with all the unflurried certainty of one who would never leave a sponge within or create an unsightly scar without.

The Doctor surveyed his handiwork from all angles. He added a touch here and a touch there till he had achieved a smoothness altogether professional. He swept up a few last crumbs of soil and dropped them into the furnace. He paused before putting away the pick and shovel he had been using, and found occasion for yet another artistic sweep of his trowel, which made the new surface precisely flush with the surrounding floor. At this moment of supreme concentration the porch door upstairs slammed with the report of a minor piece of artillery, which, appropriately enough, caused Dr. Rankin to jump as if he had been shot.

The Doctor lifted a frowning face and an attentive ear. He heard two pairs of heavy feet clump across the resonant floor of the porch. He heard the house door opened and the visitors

Copyright, 1942, by John Collier; originally appeared in "The New Yorker"

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enter the hall, with which his cellar communicated by a short flight of steps. He heard whistling and then the voices of Buck and Bud crying, "Doc! Hi, Doc! They're biting!"

Whether the Doctor was not inclined for fishing that day, or whether, like others of his large and heavy type, he experienced an especially sharp, unsociable reaction on being suddenly startled, or whether he was merely anxious to finish undisturbed the job in hand and proceed to more important duties, he did not respond immediately to the inviting outcry of his friends. Instead, he listened while it ran its natural course, dying down at last into a puzzled and fretful dialogue.

"I guess he's out."

"I'll write a note — say we're at the creek, to come on down."

"We could tell Irene."

"But she's not here, either. You'd think *she'd* be around."

"Ought to be, by the look of the place."

"You said it, Bud. Just look at this table. You could write your name —"

"Sh-h-h! Look!"

Evidently the last speaker had noticed that the cellar door was ajar and that a light was shining below. Next moment the door was pushed wide open and Bud and Buck looked down.

"Why, Doc! There you are!"

"Didn't you hear us yelling?"

The Doctor, not too pleased at what he had overheard, nevertheless smiled his rather wooden smile as his two friends made their way down the steps. "I thought I heard someone," he said.

"We were bawling our heads off," Buck said. "Thought nobody was home. Where's Irene?"

"Visiting," said the Doctor. "She's gone visiting."

"Hey, what goes on?" said Bud. "What are you doing? Burying one of your patients, or what?"

"Oh, there's been water seeping up through the floor," said the Doctor. "I figured it might be some spring opened up or something."

"You don't say!" said Bud, assuming instantly the high ethical standpoint of the realtor. "Gee, Doc, I sold you this property. Don't say I fixed you up with a dump where there's an underground spring."

"There was water," said the Doctor.

"Yes, but, Doc, you can look on that geological map the Kiwanis Club got up. There's not a better section of subsoil in the town."

"Looks like he sold you a pup," said Buck, grinning.

"No," said Bud. "Look. When the Doc came here he was green. You'll admit he was green. The things he didn't know!"

"He bought Ted Webber's jalopy," said Buck.

"He'd have bought the Jessop place if I'd let him," said Bud. "But I wouldn't give him a bum steer."

"Not the poor, simple city slicker from Poughkeepsie," said Buck.

"Some people would have taken him," said Bud. "Maybe some people did. Not me. I recommended this

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property. He and Irene moved straight in as soon as they were married. I wouldn't have put the Doc on to a dump where there'd be a spring under the foundations."

"Oh, forget it," said the Doctor, embarrassed by this conscientiousness. "I guess it was just the heavy rains."

"By gosh!" Buck said, glancing at the besmeared point of the pickaxe. "You certainly went deep enough. Right down into the clay, huh?"

"That's four feet down, the clay," Bud said.

"Eighteen inches," said the Doctor.

"Four feet," said Bud. "I can show you on the map."

"Come on. No arguments," said Buck. "How's about it, Doc? An hour or two at the creek, eh? They're biting."

"Can't do it, boys," said the Doctor. "I've got to see a patient or two."

"Aw, live and let live, Doc," Bud said. "Give 'em a chance to get better. Are you going to depopulate the whole darn town?"

The Doctor looked down, smiled, and muttered, as he always did when this particular jest was trotted out. "Sorry, boys. I can't make it."

"Well," said Bud, disappointed, "I suppose we'd better get along. How's Irene?"

"Irene?" said the Doctor. "Never better. She's gone visiting. Albany. Got the 11-o'clock train."

"Eleven o'clock?" said Buck. "For Albany?"

"Did I say Albany?" said the Doctor. "Watertown, I meant."

"Friends in Watertown?" Buck asked.

"Mrs. Slater," said the Doctor. "Mr. and Mrs. Slater. Lived next door to 'em when she was a kid, Irene said, over on Sycamore Street."

"Slater?" said Bud. "Next door to Irene. Not in *this* town."

"Oh, yes," said the Doctor. "She was telling me all about them last night. She got a letter. Seems this Mrs. Slater looked after her when her mother was in the hospital one time."

"No," said Bud.

"That's what she told me," said the Doctor. "Of course, it was a good many years ago."

"Look, Doc," said Buck. "Bud and I were raised in this town. We've known Irene's folks all our lives. We were in and out of their house all the time. There was never anybody next door called Slater."

"Perhaps," said the Doctor, "she married again, this woman. Perhaps it was a different name."

Bud shook his head.

"What time did Irene go to the station?" Buck asked.

"Oh, about a quarter of an hour ago," said the Doctor.

"You didn't drive her?" said Buck.

"She walked," said the Doctor.

"We came down Main Street," Buck said. "We didn't meet her."

"Maybe she walked across the pasture," said the Doctor.

"That's a tough walk with a suitcase," said Buck.

"She just had a couple of things in a little bag," said the Doctor.

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Bud was still shaking his head.

Buck looked at Bud, and then at the pick, at the new, damp cement on the floor.

"Oh, God, Doc!" Bud said. "A guy like you!"

"What in the name of heaven are you two bloody fools thinking?" asked the Doctor. "What are you trying to say?"

"A spring!" said Bud. "I ought to have known right away it wasn't any spring."

The Doctor looked at his cement-work, at the pick, at the large worried faces of his two friends. His own face turned livid. "Am I crazy?" he said. "Or are you? You suggest that I've — that Irene — my wife — oh, go on! Get out! Yes, go and get the sheriff. Tell him to come here and start digging. You — get out!"

Bud and Buck looked at each other, shifted their feet, and stood still again.

"Go on," said the Doctor.

"I don't know," said Bud.

"It's not as if he didn't have the provocation," Buck said.

"God knows," Bud said.

"God knows," Buck said. "You know. I know. The whole town knows. But try telling it to a jury."

The Doctor put his hand to his head. "What's that?" he said. "What is it? Now what are you saying?"

"If this ain't being on the spot!" said Buck. "Doc, you can see how it is. It takes some thinking. We've been friends right from the start. Damn good friends."

"But we've got to think," said Bud. "It's serious. Provocation or not, there's a law in the land. There's such a thing as being an accomplice."

"You were talking about provocation," said the Doctor.

"You're right," said Buck. "And you're our friend. And if ever it could be called justified —"

"We've got to fix this somehow," said Bud.

"Justified?" said the Doctor.

"You were bound to get wised up sooner or later," said Buck.

"We could have told you," said Bud. "Only — what the hell?"

"We could," said Buck. "And we nearly did. Five years ago. Before ever you married her. You hadn't been here six months, but we sort of cottoned to you. Thought of giving you a hint. Spoke about it. Remember, Bud?"

Bud nodded. "Funny," he said. "I came right out in the open about that Jessop property. I wouldn't let you buy that, Doc. But getting married, that's something else again. We could have told you."

"We're that much responsible," Buck said.

"I'm fifty," said the Doctor. "I suppose it's pretty old for Irene."

"If you was Johnny Weissmuller at the age of twenty-one, it wouldn't make any difference," said Buck.

"I know a lot of people think she's not exactly a perfect wife," said the Doctor. "Maybe she's not. She's young. She's full of life."

"Oh, skip it!" said Buck sharply,

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looking at the raw cement. "Skip it, Doc, for God's sake."

The Doctor brushed his hand across his face. "Not everybody wants the same thing," he said. "I'm a sort of dry fellow. I don't open up very easily. Irene — you'd call her gay."

"You said it," said Buck.

"She's no housekeeper," said the Doctor. "I know it. But that's not the only thing a man wants. She's enjoyed herself."

"Yeah," said Buck. "She did."

"That's what I love," said the Doctor. "Because I'm not that way myself. She's not very deep, mentally. All right. Say she's stupid. I don't care. Lazy. No system. Well, I've got plenty of system. She's enjoyed herself. It's beautiful. It's innocent. Like a child."

"Yes. If that was all," Buck said.

"But," said the Doctor, turning his eyes full on him, "you seem to know there was more."

"Everybody knows it," said Buck.

"A decent, straightforward guy comes to a place like this and marries the town floozy," Bud said bitterly. "And nobody'll tell him. Everybody just watches."

"And laughs," said Buck. "You and me, Bud, as well as the rest."

"We told her to watch her step," said Bud. "We warned her."

"Everybody warned her," said Buck. "But people get fed up. When it got to truck drivers —"

"It was never us, Doc," said Bud, earnestly. "Not after you came along, anyway."

"The town'll be on your side," said Buck.

"That won't mean much when the case comes to trial in the county seat," said Bud.

"Oh!" cried the Doctor, suddenly. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"It's up to you, Bud," said Buck. "I can't turn him in."

"Take it easy, Doc," said Bud. "Calm down. Look, Buck. When we came in here the street was empty, wasn't it?"

"I guess so," said Buck. "Anyway, nobody saw us come down cellar."

"And we haven't been down," Bud said, addressing himself forcefully to the Doctor. "Get that, Doc? We shouted upstairs, hung around a minute or two, and cleared out. But we never came down into this cellar."

"I wish you hadn't," the Doctor said heavily.

"All you have to do is say Irene went out for a walk and never came back," said Buck. "Bud and I can swear we saw her headed out of town with a fellow in a — well, say in a Buick sedan. Everybody'll believe that, all right. We'll fix it. But later. Now we'd better scram."

"And remember, now. Stick to it. We never came down here and we haven't seen you today," said Bud. "So long!"

Buck and Bud ascended the steps, moving with a rather absurd degree of caution. "You'd better get that . . . that thing covered up," Buck said over his shoulder.

Left alone, the Doctor sat down on

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an empty box, holding his head with both hands. He was still sitting like this when the porch door slammed again. This time he did not start. He listened. The house door opened and closed. A voice cried, "Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo! I'm back."

The Doctor rose slowly to his feet. "I'm down here, Irene!" he called.

The cellar door opened. A young woman stood at the head of the steps. "Can you beat it?" she said. "I missed the damn train."

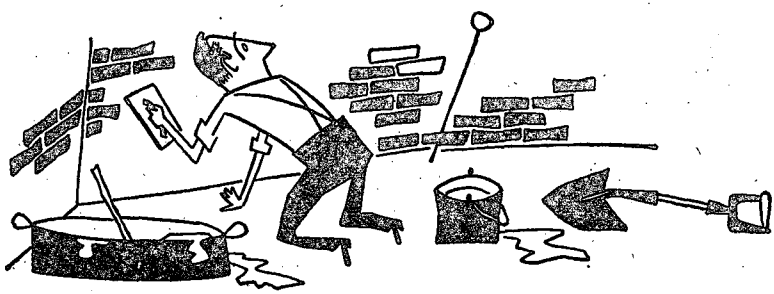
"Oh!" said the Doctor, looking up. "Did you come back across the field?"

"Yes, like a fool," she said. "I could have hitched a ride and caught the train up the line. Only I didn't think. If you'd run me over to the junction, I could still make it."

"Maybe," said the Doctor. "Did you meet anyone coming back?"

"Not a soul," she said. "Aren't you finished with that old job yet?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to take it all up again," said the Doctor. "Come down here, my dear, and I'll show you."



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The year 1952 added two criminological cornerstones to QUEEN'S QUORUM. *The first was by the creator of Colonel Anthony Gethryn and the author of such modern classics as* THE RASP *(1924) and* WARRANT FOR X *(1938) . . .*

Queen's Quorum Number 108:
Philip MacDonald's
SOMETHING TO HIDE
Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952

This book was published in England as FINGERS OF FEAR *(London: Collins, 1953).*

To represent Philip MacDonald we bring you his newest suspense story —a prize-winner in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. It is a seemingly quiet tale, but like so many of Mr. MacDonald's stories it has terrifying implications. In some respects it will remind you of Mr. MacDonald's now famous story, "Love Lies Bleeding," which explored "an offbeat theme . . . with the clashing forces of the normal and abnormal."

DREAM NO MORE

by PHILIP MACDONALD

JOHN GARROWAY AND HIS PASSENGER drove into El Morro Beach a little before noon. The convertible was open, and they could see everything as they rolled down the last hill toward the center of the clustered little town on the bay, with the cliffs and the sea to one side of it, the hillsides with their scattered houses to the other.

To John, whose home had been here since he was a small boy — since his father had died, in fact — the charm of the place was familiar, something you felt rather than noticed. But to his passenger, it was new and surprising and obviously delightful.

The passenger's name was Gavin Rhodes. He was a Ph.D., and, besides being John Garroway's friend, was also his English professor. He was one of those not-so-old, not-so-young men frequently found in the teaching profession. Actually, his age was 46, but he might have been five years younger or a couple older. He was tall and wide-shouldered and slender, with a gift for looking at once careless and well-groomed in anything he wore. He had sensitive, clearly cut features, with a mouth which seemed narrow only at moments of concentration, and his dark hair carried a nicely balanced flecking of gray at the

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temples. As he darted eager glances all around, his eyes sparkled. He said, "Enchanting, really enchanting . . ."

"Thought you'd like it," John said. "Wait till we get to the other side. It's even better."

Gavin said, "That, me lad, is hard to believe." It was one of his mannerisms, calling people he liked "me lad" or "me gal" according to gender. He went on looking about him with frank pleasure, but then, as they reached the bottom of the hill and slowed at the corner by the El Morro Hotel, he grew suddenly grave and said sharply, "John! Did you call your mother?"

"Oh-oh!" John's twenty-two-year-old face was sheepish. "Clean forgot." He glanced sideways at his companion. "Doesn't matter though. Mom — Mother won't mind. She likes surprises."

"Won't do, John." The tone was decisive. "Park somewhere and find a telephone. Your mother may not mind being a surprised hostess. I, definitely, refuse to be a surprise guest!"

Frowning, John shrugged his big shoulders. But he pulled to the curb, just past the hotel entrance. He switched off the engine and ran a troubled hand over his blond, crew-cut hair.

"Don't pout, John." Gavin was laughing at him now. "It doesn't become your style of beauty, me lad!"

"Okay," John said. "Okay." He smiled suddenly, giving in completely, as he always did.

At the southern end of El Morro Beach, Espada Point juts out into the ocean, towering above the sand and surf. It is reached by a narrow private road which turns at right angles off the coast highway, and it is occupied, entirely, by the Garroway property — the rambling green-roofed gray house and its surrounding garden.

Mrs. Garroway was in the garden, standing by the top of the steps which ran down the almost sheer face of the cliff to the beach a hundred feet below. She was looking at the cobalt of the ocean and the gold of the sand and the little, sparsely dotted figures of the few people in Timber Cove. She had been cutting flowers, and a shallow basket filled with multi-colored blooms was over her arm. She was a slim but still pleasantly rounded 50, and frequently looked eight or nine years younger. She had an innocuous, regularly featured face which had been called pretty when she was a young woman, and now was saved from middle-aged insignificance by a pair of magnificent dark eyes.

She turned toward the house and was halfway across the lawn when she heard the telephone ringing. She began to run and burst in through the front door just as the telephone was on its fourth peal. She heard movement at the end of the passage and called breathlessly, "It's all right, Mollie, I'll get it.

She dumped the flower basket onto a chair, snatched up the phone, and said, "Hello —?" and then, after a moment, "*Johnnie!* Where are you,

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darling? I thought you'd be here by now."

She listened to a long speech, and the smile, which had made her look almost like a girl, slowly faded. She said, "Oh, John, I don't think —" and then checked herself.

She said, "But of course, darling! I'll be very glad to see any friend of yours. It was only — well, I'm a foolish old woman. I was just disappointed I wasn't going to have you to myself."

She listened some more, then said, "Don't be silly, dear. Of *course* it's all right! Bring him along right away."

She hung up gently and walked slowly to the kitchen.

She pushed open the swing door, but only a little, as if she didn't want to be seen by the small shrewd eyes in Mollie's copper-colored face.

She said gaily, "Set another place for lunch, Mollie. Mr. John's bringing a friend for the weekend."

It was 6 o'clock, and the slanting sun splashed a swath of gold across the sea and into Timber Cove.

John and Gavin lay on their towels just beneath the cliff. They lay without talking, soaking in peace and warmth and the silence which seemed only deepened by the murmur of the ocean and the occasional crying of a gull.

Gavin propped himself up on an elbow, looked around him, and said softly, " 'I sat beside the evening sea, and dreamed a dream that could not be' —"

"What's that from?" John sat up. "How's it go on?"

Gavin laughed. "I've forgotten," he said. "And it's a misquotation anyway. It's '*I walked*'."

"Sure you've forgotten? Or don't you like the rest?"

"Bit of both, me lad." Gavin lay down again, stretching out on his back with hands locked behind his head. His slim taut body, its tan smooth and dark, looked like a Greek bronze.

John said. "What was the dream about? You can remember if you try."

"The poet's I wouldn't know. My own was definitely a compliment — to the Garroway family."

"How?" John said. He looked eager and enjoyably puzzled, like a child watching a conjuror.

"Are you utterly insensible to what you have here, me lad!" Gavin made a little, all-embracing gesture. "That house — that garden — this cove! . . . All this, I might say, and Sanctuary too!"

"I *knew* you'd like it," John said, and then, "Sanctuary? What from?"

"My cherished infant!" Gavin laughed. "From everything that you and I don't want. Everything that grates. All the — the *bru-ha-ha* of our ill-fated century, including the H-bomb!"

"Yes. I see what you mean. . . ." John's young face was grave.

"Now for the compliment," Gavin said. "My dream that couldn't be was — well, put in simple words for the young, it was just that I was going

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to stay here for the rest of my life."

He laughed, and looked up at the sun. "Hey! It must be after 6!"

"Guess we'd better get back," John said. He heaved his big body to its feet and picked up his towel. He said suddenly:

"Look, Gavin, you don't *have* to go Monday, do you?"

Gavin rose in one smooth movement. His lithe body made John's look clumsy and overmuscled. "I'm afraid I do," he said. "The Stones are expecting me. It's not that I wouldn't like to stay, but —" He broke off, smiling. "I've remembered the next two lines of that stanza — 'The waves that plunged along the shore said only, Dreamer, dream no more.' "

"Now look," John said, "You could send a wire and say you were sick —"

"Don't be mulish, me lad!" Gavin's tone was sharp. He turned and started for the steps in the cliff, but John caught up to him in two strides.

"Now don't get mad," John said. "Please . . ."

Gavin stopped at the foot of the steps, his hand on the white post which carried a *PRIVATE PROPERTY* sign. He laughed and said, "You tend to forget I'm a testy old man. Sorry."

"What've *you* got to apologize about!" Relief was painted on John's face with a broad-stroked brush. "I was just nervous, I guess. All I wanted to say was that if Mother seemed — well, sort of stiff and social and — and artificial, it's only because she's really awfully shy. You'd never think so, but —"

"Johannes, Johannes!" Gavin cut him short. "It's nothing to do with your mother — who is charming, perfectly charming. It is simply that it would be impolitic for me to offend a senior member of the Faculty like Bob Stone. You young plutocrats don't realize the economic situation of the paupers who endeavor to instruct you."

"Okay," John said. "Okay." And then he said, "It's a damn shame!"

Gavin was eyeing the steps, running his glance up their steepness. They were concrete built into the rock; their risers were high but the treads were wide enough for two to use abreast. He said, "A challenge, me lad! Race you to the top!"

John grinned. "You'll be sorry!"

"So?" said Gavin, and maneuvered into position for the inside track. "You ready? All right, then — *off!*"

It was close for half the ascent, and then Gavin forged ahead, to arrive at the top a winner by some half a dozen steps. He was about to turn and jeer at John, puffing and panting behind him, when he looked across the lawn and saw a car roll down the private road and stop outside the garage. It was a coupé — very clean, very shining, but at least twenty years old. Enid Garroway was erect at the wheel, and behind her, its head thrust out of the window, was a big dog with a dark and saturnine face.

Gavin heard John at his shoulder and turned to smile at him. John said,

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still puffing, "Isn't that — a god-awful jalopy — of Mother's. She won't — get rid of it —"

The dog bayed at them, and Gavin said, "Who's her friend?"

"That's Gill. He was at the vet's — for a bath —" John sounded worried. "Watch him till he knows you."

Her back to them, Mrs. Garroway was getting out of the car. The dog bayed again, and John's mother tilted the car seat forward to let him out.

"Hold it, Mother!" John shouted, but the dog was already streaking across the lawn toward them. It was heavy and powerfully built, standing as high as a collie, but with a flat wiry coat, almost black.

John ran ahead of Gavin and roared, "Gill! Gill! Down, sir!" But the dog swerved out of John's reach and came on.

Mrs. Garroway ran onto the lawn. She looked frightened. Her son's big back was blocking her view; then she moved past him, and stopped dead.

Gill was sitting erect on his short stub of a tail, with both his forepaws in Gavin's hands; the dog reached up the full stretch of his neck so that he could lick Gavin's face.

John said, "For God's sake, Mom, will you look at that!" His eyes were fixed on Gavin and the dog, and there was a sort of awed quality to his smile. Mrs. Garroway turned away and walked quickly toward the house.

John called, "Wait a minute, Mother —" and she said, without turning around, "I have several things to do before dinner." She was frowning, and there was a cold stiffness in her voice which she seemed unable to control.

She got rid of the frown before cocktail time, but the stiffness persisted. Whatever she said or did, or omitted to do or say, the stiffness persisted. She didn't seem able to help it — in spite of the effect it was having on John.

If Gavin Rhodes noticed anything, however, he gave no sign. He was the perfect guest, never speaking unless it was plain he should, and then talking well and easily. And the dog Gill, having started by following him wherever he moved, at last sat motionless beside his chair at the dining-table.

Mrs. Garroway commented on this early in the meal. She said sharply, "*Look* at that dog, John! Make him go away and lie down!"

Her son glared at her and said, "He's perfectly all right, Mother. Unless Gavin doesn't like him sitting there."

Gavin, blandly ignoring the crackling static of conflict, said he was flattered, and slid smoothly into talk of dogs in general and of Gill in particular. It was a useful topic, and lasted quite a while, with John relating how he and his mother had bought Gill as a mongrel pup from a drunken Swedish sailor in San Diego, and Gavin cutting in, astonished, saying, "Mongrel! He's an aristocrat!"

John stared, and even Mrs. Garroway showed signs of interest.

Gavin said, "He's a Rottweiler, me lad — and a damn good one." He

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launched upon a brief history of the breed, from its beginnings as cattle-guard for Roman invading armies, through its adoption and development by the livestock breeders of Würtemberg, down to its recrudescence as a police and war dog.

"That's *fascinating!*" John said. "Isn't it, Mother?" He was beaming.

And that was the end of that — because Mrs. Garroway said, "Most interesting," and the stiffness overwhelmed everything once more. She shot a miserable glance at John, and then made matters worse by trying again and saying, "You seem to have a remarkable fund of information, Doctor Rhodes."

John groaned, "Oh, *Mother!*" Then he closed his mouth as Gavin looked at Mrs. Garroway and said easily, "My dear lady, I'm a mine of smatterings — none of them economically utile. It's a sort of parlor trick . . ."

He went on talking and managed to keep discomfort at bay until the meal was practically over and Mollie brought in the coffee. On the tray she also brought a squat dark bottle which she placed firmly in front of Mrs. Garroway with the words, "Now don't you go forgettin' these tonight!"

John winced as Mrs. Garroway opened the bottle and shook two big yellow capsules into her palm. The procedure seemed to have for him a last-straw quality, and he said, almost savagely, "For God's sake, Mother! Do you *have* to dose yourself?"

Enid Garroway stared at him. Her face flushed, then paled. Deliberately, she put the capsules into her mouth, took a sip of water, and swallowed them. She didn't speak.

Gavin slid into the breach. He took a small flat box from a pocket, opened it, tipped out two white tablets, and casually swallowed them. He smiled at Mrs. Garroway and said, "The trouble with the young is really a matter of psychostomachies. They can't conceive the importance of the digestive tract."

It was his first conversational failure. John, still glaring at his mother, didn't seem to hear, and Mrs. Garroway herself merely said, "It's a vitamin and mineral mixture I'm supposed to take . . ."

Gavin seemed to shrug without moving his shoulders. He didn't talk any more, and it was in miserable silence, with the stiffness surrounding them like invisible plastic, that they moved into the living-room. John, muttering something no one could hear, lost himself in the corner by the radio-phonograph and began to search through albums of records. Mrs. Garroway sat, very straight, in her usual chair by the piano. Gavin lounged on the big sofa, scratching Gill's head until the dog suddenly put out a forefoot and rested it on his knee in a gesture of dignified supplication.

Gavin looked at Mrs. Garroway. "I have a notion our friend here would like to take me for a walk. You won't mind, will you?" He said it easily,

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and then, just as easily, stood up and walked out of the room, the dog at his side. The door closed behind them.

John slammed the record album shut, scrambled to his feet, and strode across the room to stand over his mother. His face was white and pinched-looking around the mouth. He was breathing fast. He said unsteadily:

"Look, Mother, what exactly are you trying to do? Why not be honest? If you don't like my friends, come clean with it. Tell them — or me. Or if you can't do that, at least remember there *are* rules of hospitality!"

Enid Garroway looked up at him. Her eyes fell from his. She said, "I — I don't know what you're talking about, Johnnie —" and then couldn't go on.

John said, "Oh, yes, you do!" He drew a deep breath. "Either be honest, and tell me — or him! — that you don't want Gavin Rhodes in the house. *Or* behave with ordinary courtesy!"

She said, weakly, "I — I still don't follow, Johnnie —"

"For God's sake, Mother, *will* you remember I'm not a child!" John's hands clenched at his sides. "If it's of any interest to you at all, the man you've been so — so vilely rude to is the best friend I'll ever have! A better friend than I've any right to!"

He turned away. Hands thrust into pockets, head down, he began to pace the room. Mrs. Garroway's eyes were glistening, and now a tear trickled from the corner of one of them. She said, "I didn't mean — I didn't know I was being — being uncivil to Doctor Rhodes . . . I — I'm awfully sorry, darling."

John stopped in the middle of the room. His hands were out of his pockets now, and he was beating a fist into a palm. He said, "I can't understand why you're behaving like this! It's not *you!* It isn't you at all!"

Enid Garroway went to her son and put her hands on his shoulders. She said, "I'm a silly old woman, Johnnie — I was jealous. Don't you see? I — I'd made a lot of plans — of things we were going to do together, when you weren't out with Betty Lou —" Her voice wavered and broke, and she was suddenly in his arms, her face buried against his shoulder.

Slowly, John's frown dissolved. He said huskily, "It's all right, Mom, it's all right."

She pulled away from him, desperately found a handkerchief, and dabbed at her eyes and kissed him. "I'm sorry, Johnnie, I'm so sorry."

John made her sit down again, and brought her a pony of brandy and sat on the arm of her chair. Very soon he had steered the talk back to Gavin, telling her the whole story of the friendship from the time when they had met in Gavin's first class of the semester and had immediately liked each other . . .

John's eyes were alight, and he gestured as he talked. He said, "I can't begin to explain what it means

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to me, having Gavin for a friend. If you knew even a part of what he has done for me, Mother —"

He broke off. Mrs. Garroway looked at him and said, "Tell me, Johnnie — do tell me."

He said, in a sudden rush of words, "For one thing he's shown me what I'm going to do with my life! . . . I'm going to write, Mother! Write — and write — and write! Until I've written something worthwhile." He glared at her, then suddenly smiled. "Listen to me, for God's sake! The boy genius, huh? . . . Look, Mother, just forget all the trimmings and remember your son's going to be a writer."

Enid Garroway reached up, took his hand, and squeezed it. "That's wonderful, darling," she said. "Could I possibly read something . . . sometime?"

"Sure," said her son. "Sure. I'll dig out something tomorrow."

"You know what I think?" Mrs. Garroway said. "I think we ought to have a drink on this —" And, as if on cue, they heard Gill bark outside and the crunching of Gavin's feet on the gravel. She added quickly, "Oh, isn't that lucky! Now Doctor Rhodes can have one with us!"

John bent down and kissed her. "Attagirl!" he said. He was at the other end of the room, mixing drinks, when Gavin came in with the dog at his heels.

There was no stiffness in the atmosphere now, and Gavin was full of quiet gaiety. He took a highball from John, and described how Gill had taken him along the beach. He said, "He's quite a fellow," reaching down a hand and patting the dog's shoulder. "Quite a fellow! . . . What impressed me most was the steps. You see, I ran down them — I hate *walking* any kind of stairs, either way — and instead of getting in my way, or trying to pass, he kept a safe four steps behind me. As I say, I was impressed."

The dog raised its head and stared up at him, resting its chin on the arm of the chair.

"*Look* at that, Mother!" John said.

Mrs. Garroway said, "It's — it's unbelievable!" She smiled at Gavin. "There's one thing, Doctor Rhodes — you'll never need a character reference with Gill around!"

Gavin looked across at her. "My *dear* lady! Surely you don't subscribe to that misleading cliché about dogs and children!"

John laughed, and Mrs. Garroway said, "I've always thought the most frightening thing about clichés was that they were true."

"Only in the main," Gavin said. "One might almost say — when they are true they are very very true; but when they are bad they are horrid."

"Like the little girl with the curl," said Mrs. Garroway.

Gavin went on looking at her with mock gravity. "Exactly," he said. "And let me warn you that the horridest of all is the dangerous, the fatal idea that persons to whom dogs and children take a fancy must *ipso*

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facto be sterling and trustworthy characters."

He said, "For all you know, I might be planning some skulduggery right now. Such as stealing the silver." He smiled suddenly, impishly. "Or something on a larger scale, maybe . . ."

The next day passed pleasantly, except for one minor cloud which arose at lunchtime and was concerned with John's reluctance to keep a dinner engagement with a childhood girl friend. But when Gavin added a biting comment to Mrs. Garroway's pleas the boy gave in.

Which explains how it was that John's mother and John's friend dined *à deux* that night, seeming to enjoy each other's company as much as the excellent food.

It was almost at the end of the meal that Mrs. Garroway said suddenly: "I ought to thank you, Doctor Rhodes, for persuading John to go out with Betty Lou." She hesitated. "She's a nice child, really. And she's terribly in love with him."

Gavin smiled. "That shows good taste, at least."

There was a silence, and during it Mollie brought in coffee. After she had poured it, Mrs. Garroway took her two capsules from the bottle on the tray, and Gavin, smiling at her, took his tablets from the box in his pocket.

He said, "Don't worry about John, Mrs. Garroway. He's merely going through that tiresome process known as growing up."

"I know," Mrs. Garroway said, "I know." She sighed, and her face seemed older. She sat straighter and said abruptly, "John seems determined to make a career out of writing. What do you think about it? About his chances?"

Gavin looked at her shrewdly. "You've been reading some of his stuff, haven't you?"

"Yes. This morning. I — I didn't like it." She drew a deep breath. "I thought it was — well, not very well written."

Gavin said, "Don't be discouraged. The boy has talent. Latent — but lots of it . . ." He hesitated. "As to a career, let me put it this way: *If* John has to earn his living when he leaves college, then I couldn't practically recommend writing for his profession. But, if he hasn't — if there's enough money, to put it vulgarly — then I most definitely do! As I said, there's talent in him."

He had been looking down, but now he raised his eyes to Mrs. Garroway's. "You'll have to forgive my bluntness," he said.

"There's nothing to forgive," Mrs. Garroway said, and smiled at him. "Now I'll answer *your* question. John does *not* have to worry about earning his way. We live quietly, as you see, but then I'm naturally unostentatious. There's plenty of money. More than enough." She stopped abruptly, as if she had intended to say more, then decided not to.

Gavin said slowly, "Then let him write — *make* him write."

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Mrs. Garroway looked at him steadily. She said, "Thank you. You've made me feel better. Ever so much better!"

That was at 8 o'clock. Two and a half hours later, John Garroway turned his convertible into the private road and swooped down toward the house.

His headlights showed him the open maw of the garage, with his mother's ancient but gleaming coupé parked neatly at the left. They also showed the unexpected sight of a man's figure, its back to him, bent over at one side of the open door. John braked, and the figure straightened, turned, and revealed itself as Gavin. Beside him was the dark shape of Gill, a short heavy stick between his jaws.

John pulled up on the apron of the garage. He leaned out and said, "Hi! . . . What you doing?" and Gavin came nearer to the car. He was drying his hands on a handkerchief, and he grinned and said, "Washing. Any rule against it?"

John looked past him and saw the tin of powdered soap under the faucet in the wall. He grinned and said, "What's the matter with a bathroom?" and Gavin looked down at the dog and said, "Gill, you explain."

The dog made a sound in his throat, refusing to release the stick. Gavin grinned at John. "It's all his fault. We found that stick on the beach and he brought it up. I was throwing it for him and it went under your mother's car." He looked at his hands, then ruefully down at the knees of his trousers. "I, of course, did the retrieving."

John laughed. "You and that dog!" he said, and drove slowly into the garage.

As he came out, Gavin was putting the can of soap back on the shelf. They stepped out onto the apron together and John jerked a contemptuous thumb at the coupé. "I *wish* Mother would get rid of that heap," he said, and reached up, pulled down the garage door, and bolted it.

Gavin tucked away his handkerchief. "Got off early, didn't you?" he said. "How was the young woman?"

John's big shoulders lifted in a shrug. "Oh, all right, I guess."

They walked slowly to the house, and on the porch Gavin stopped, looking around him. He said, "God, it's beautiful here!" — and sighed.

John said, "How did you and Mother get on?" He said it awkwardly, as if he'd had to force himself to say it.

But Gavin didn't seem to notice. He said, "Like a house afire, me lad. . . . She was kind enough to ask me to stay on."

"That's wonderful!" John beamed. "Now I can go ahead with that 'Turtle Dove' story. You could sort of steer me on every day's work —"

Gavin smiled. "After I've spent a couple of days with the Stones," he said. "But I could be back on Wednesday, around lunchtime."

John's smile vanished. He said,

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"Oh, hell —" and Gavin threw a casual arm around John's shoulders.

The morning came, promising another gemlike day, and Gavin Rhodes, adamant in turning down all John's offers to drive him the sixty-odd miles to Coronado, packed a suitcase, had breakfast, and allowed John to take him down to the Greyhound station in El Morro. Gavin promised he'd be back by the noon bus on Wednesday . . .

The rest of Monday passed, and all Tuesday. On Wednesday, just after noon, the Greyhound from San Diego rolled down the highway into El Morro, turned left on Pine Avenue, and hissed to a stop.

Gavin, suitcase in hand, was the first passenger to alight. He looked quickly around, and then started across the street to where John's convertible was parked at the curb, conspicuous by the shining cream of its paint and the scarlet spokes of its wire wheels. Gavin stared at its driver — and broke into a run which took him across the road in long strides.

He reached the side of the car and said, "John — for God's sake — what've you done to yourself?"

John grinned. "You ought to see the other guy!" he said. There was a broad band of adhesive tape across a dressing on his forehead, and two similar patches on cheek and jaw. And his right forearm, as it lay on the wheel, was bandaged from wrist to elbow.

Gavin threw his suitcase into the back seat and climbed into the car. His face was gray-pale under its heavy tan. He said, sharply, "Don't play the fool. What happened?"

John said, "Okay, okay, keep your shirt on. Little car trouble, that's all. That jalopy of Mother's turned on me . . ." He laughed, and started the engine.

Over the whir of the starter Gavin's voice was loud. "What the hell are you talking about? You never drive the thing!"

John let the motor idle. He said, "Well, I did. Day before yesterday. Only a couple hours after you'd left, as a matter of fact." He grinned at Gavin again, plainly delighted to be the focal point of an adventure. "Mother wanted me to pick her up a new tire. So I climbed in the heap and started to bring it downtown here. I thought the brakes seemed on the spongy side, but I didn't really worry about them." His laugh was almost a giggle. "Then I started down the steep stretch past the Golf Club. I was doing about forty, I guess — maybe a little better — when I saw the signal against me at the bottom, *and* a couple of damn big oil trucks turning out of the canyon road. So I started to brake. Only there weren't any brakes! I mean, not any!"

He giggled again and looked at Gavin, who muttered under his breath.

"So I had to think pretty fast," John said. "I steered as close as I could to the shoulder — it's real soft

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along there — and I jumped . . ."

Gavin muttered again. Some of the color was back under his tan, but his face was still set, unsmiling.

"Well, I rolled quite a way," John said. "I ended up in the ditch, a little woozy but all in one piece." He grinned. "Good day's work, really — you know how I hated that heap."

"What happened to it?" Gavin said.

"What didn't!" John laughed. "Scratch one jalopy! . . . I'd tried to head it in to the side, but somehow it went on and hit one of the trucks square amidships. Fortunately nothing exploded — but, brother, the thing sure wrecked itself!"

Gavin said, "What had happened to the brakes?" He was pulling a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, looking down at it as he spoke.

"There wasn't any fluid," John said. "The master cylinder must have sprung a leak. The crate was pretty ancient, and that sort of thing is always happening."

"Yes," Gavin said, "I suppose it is." He shook his head. "Thank God it wasn't your mother! She might — she might have been killed!"

A little shudder shook John's shoulders. "She would have been," he said.

The days ran into each other in gold-and-blue sequence, and now, after ten days which seemed to have passed like two, there were only 48 hours left before Gavin must leave, to return to the University and take up the Summer School teaching which, as he explained with a wry smile, was necessitated by the inevitable penury, in this day and age, of a tutor of the young.

He broke the news at breakfast. John dropped his knife and fork and said, "Gavin, you can't go! Isn't there any way you can duck it?" And Mrs. Garroway, who had long since dropped the "Doctor," said, "Oh, *no*, Gavin! You mustn't leave us like this." And Gill chose this exact moment to emit one of what John called his "lost lone wolf" whines, and even Mollie, who happened to be in the breakfast room at the time, said, "Why, Mister-Doctor-Rhodes, sir, you ain't never goin' to up an' run out on us!"

But Gavin Rhodes made it clear that leave he must. He had, it seemed, already booked plane passage for the day after tomorrow.

"Which brings me," he said, "to the real point. Which is an invitation — an invitation to which I'll brook no refusal!" He smiled at the Garroways, and explained. The Tollers were at the Grand Theater in Los Angeles, winding up a triumphal tour in *Paradise For Fools*, and he wanted Mrs. Garroway and John to be his guests at the performance tonight, after they'd been his guests at dinner.

"There's a catch in it, of course," he said. "There always is with me. John, I hope, will drive us up, but I want to see my lawyer, so I'd have to be in town a couple of hours before dinner time."

And it was arranged that way. They left El Morro at 3:15 and

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reached Los Angeles just before 5. They separated outside the Biltmore Garage with an agreement to meet at Escoffier's at 7 on the dot. John and his mother took a taxi for parts west, where Mrs. Garroway would do some feminine shopping and John would browse in his favorite bookstore. Gavin set off on foot in the direction of Spring Street.

But he never reached it. As soon as he had turned the corner into Pershing Square, he changed his course, cutting over to Seventh. Instead of seeming pressed for time and a trifle on edge about his appointment, he now strolled easily along the crowded sidewalks until he came to a big chain drugstore sandwiched between a newsreel theater and a restaurant.

He went into the drugstore and came out, five minutes later, stowing a small package into his hip pocket. He started strolling again, this time striking south, but all the time keeping to the bigger, more crowded thoroughfares.

He visited in turn a jewelry store, another druggist, a giant establishment labeled *Helstrom's Hardware — Everything For The Home And Garden*, then back again to Pershing Square — to a quiet tobacco-and-pipe shop.

When he left the last, it was barely 6 o'clock and he still had an hour to kill. Disposed in the pockets of his loosely cut suit were his purchases from the drug stores and the Helstrom emporium. In one neat parcel which he carried openly were the separate packages from the other stores.

He struck over to Fifth again and to the Biltmore Garage. He found John's car and put one parcel in the glove compartment. He crossed back to the hotel, went to the bar, and had two quiet, quick drinks. When he lifted the first, there was a faint tremor in his fingers, but when he set the glass down the hand was as steady as a watchmaker's.

He then took a taxi to Escoffier's. Ten minutes after his arrival he was joined by Mrs. Garroway and John, and then began a highly successful evening, with Gavin as perfect a host as he had proved himself a guest. The dinner was good, their seats at the theater better, and the play itself best of all.

They were home by twenty to 1 and, to John's and Gavin's astonishment, found supper waiting for them. It was laid out in the living-room, in front of a log fire which had been lighted long enough to be cheerful and recently enough not to be giving off too much heat. It was a good and imaginative meal, with everything ready to be heated and eaten, or opened and drunk. They served themselves, Mrs. Garroway controlling the chafing dishes, Gavin in charge of the liquor, and John feeding the victrola with suitable music.

It was just after they had finished that Gavin, detaching Gill's adoring head from his knee, left the room suddenly, to return with the parcel he had stored in the glove compartment of the car. He opened it to reveal two small gift packages which he carried

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to the hearth, where he stood between Mrs. Garroway and John. He said, "*Timeo Danaes* —" and made the presentations on just the right note of mock ceremony — for John the latest in wickless lighters, for Mrs. Garroway a miniature flashlight for her purse, surprisingly efficient and charming to look at in its case of hammered silver.

They thanked him, Mrs. Garroway with a flush in her cheeks which made her look younger than ever, John with a wide embarrassed grin and eyes which — perhaps because of the drinks he had had — were suspiciously moist . . .

It was an hour later that Mrs. Garroway, pulling a robe around her over her nightgown, went into her son's room. John was in bed, reading. She sat on the edge of it as John said, "Hi, Mother, come to tuck me in?" He was a trifle high, but in spite of the smile he didn't look happy.

Mrs. Garroway put out a hand as if to touch him, but then drew it back into her lap. She said, "Wasn't that a lovely evening? I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more!"

John said, "It was swell —" and then frowned at himself for juvenility. "I mean it was — perfect. It was *whole* — a sort of *entity* of a party."

"That sounds awfully clever, darling." Mrs. Garroway laughed softly. "But I think I know what you mean."

"It was Gavin, of course," John said. "When he does something, he does it *right*!"

He sat up and locked his arms around his knees under the covers. He gave up all pretense of sophistication, looked at his mother, and said, "Isn't he terrific, Mom? Isn't he?"

Mrs. Garroway's hand came out again, and this time it did touch him, for one brief instant passing across his forehead and sliding down his cheek. She said, "Darling, I think he's perfectly charming. In fact," she added, "I'm not sure he isn't *the* most charming person I ever met."

She stood up then, bent over the bed, and kissed her son. "You'd better go to sleep, hadn't you, Johnnie?" she said. "Didn't I hear you promising Gavin you'd finish that story before he left?"

"That's right," John said, and as she reached the door he put down his book and turned out the light.

Mrs. Garroway went back to her own room, passing the head of the stairs. She didn't see Gill — whom she'd put to bed on the back porch half an hour ago — crouching at the foot.

Her door closed, and the dog began noiselessly to mount the stairs. He reached the landing and padded along the corridor of the ell, toward the guest rooms. He stopped at the last door and raised a tentative foot to scratch at the lower panel.

Inside the room, Gavin Rhodes started involuntarily at the sound. In pajamas, he was seated at the writing table in the window. Spread out over the blotter in front of him was a newspaper upon which, open and spilling their contents, were the pack-

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ages he had carried back in his pockets from Los Angeles.

The scratch at the door came again. Gavin smiled and got to his feet. He opened the door silently, and Gill flowed into the room.

Gavin said quietly, "Hello, chum — late tonight, aren't you?"

Gill wagged the whole rear half of his big body. Gavin stroked his head, then pointed to the corner by the head of the bed. Without hesitation, the dog padded over, settled himself on the rug, and lay down. One contented sigh escaped him, and then he slept.

Gavin sat down at the writing table again. He lifted a hand and saw that it was trembling. Then he leaned back, deliberately relaxing, closing his eyes and letting his arms hang down almost to the floor.

After a few moments he opened his eyes and sat up. He held both hands out, looking at them. The fingers were steady now. He hitched his chair closer to the table, picked up a small cardboard box which had come out of one of the packages, opened it, and shook out the upper and lower halves of several gelatin capsules, ready to be filled and put together. The capsules were yellow.

Gavin picked out two halves and placed them in the middle of the newspaper. From another package he took a small envelope which he opened carefully. It was filled with a fine-grained, dark-gray powder, which he spooned into the lower half of the capsule with the blade of a penknife until the gelatin container was half full. . . . Now the last of the packages — and another envelope — and a little pile of brownish crystals which he added to the powder . . .

And then he was staring down at a complete capsule, dark yellow against the white paper, which was identical in size and color with the capsules which Enid Garroway took every night with her coffee.

It was over. It was done. At the first try. He examined it carefully, holding it this way and that against the light. Satisfied, he crossed to the closet and very carefully put the capsule into a pocket of his dark jacket.

He crossed the room and picked up a traveling clock from the bedside table. Its hands stood at twenty minutes past 3. He pondered a moment, set the alarm for 7:30, then went back to the writing table and carefully wrapped the remains of all the packages in the newspaper, making a neat parcel which he slid under his pillow.

Five minutes later he was in bed.

The alarm went off, faithfully, at half-past 7.

Gavin dragged himself out of bed, shaved, and took a shower, making a minimum of noise in the process.

He was out of the house, Gill beside him, at five minutes to 8 — having heard vague sounds of Mollie beginning to move about in her room behind the garage. Beneath his coat was the parcel wrapped in newspaper.

He circled the garden and came to

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the latticed enclosure which hid the big incinerator. Quietly, he lifted the iron lid and slipped the parcel into the dark maw.

He struck a match, touched it to the edge of the paper, and stood by, picking up the iron bar which served for a poker and continually stirring at the flaming mass until, with hardly a wisp of smoke, it was completely consumed.

He raked over the pile of ash, then put the poker back as he had found it. With Gill at his heels, he left the latticed enclosure and went along the path beside the privet hedge and came to the steps to the beach.

He trotted down their steepness, not quite so fast as usual. Gill, who had dropped behind, followed four steps behind.

They reached the sand and started along it, southward. The dog shed his staidness and raced around Gavin in furious, ever-widening circles. The beach was deserted, and the little breeze off the ocean was light and heady, like a good champagne, and the climbing sun sparkled on the crests of the little rippling waves.

Gavin breathed deeply as he walked. At first his hands were thrust into his pockets, but presently he took them out and, still walking, held them in front of him, eyeing them critically. They were steady, absolutely steady, and he smiled to himself. He spotted a piece of driftwood, picked it up, and threw it into the gentle foam of the surf as Gill plunged delightedly after it . . .

They reached the house again at 9:30, Gavin looking as fresh as if he had had eight hours of undisturbed sleep; Gill was drenched and ecstatic. Gavin left him outside to dry off, went in, found Mollie, and within minutes was eating an enormous breakfast.

It was 11 before Mrs. Garroway came downstairs, and nearly noon before there was any sight of John. He appeared in robe and pajamas, announcing that he had a hangover and regarding Gavin's obvious well-being with admiring awe.

Gavin laughed at him. "All you need, me lad, is a good honest sweat." He outlined a program: John would eat; John would change; John and Gavin would visit the Tennis Club and play two hard sets of singles, after which they would drive straight back, go down to the beach, and swim.

John blinked. "But I've got to work," he said. "You wanted me to finish that thing —"

Gavin cut him short. "You'll never write a line worth anything, me lad, with a head full of cotton!"

As it turned out, Gavin's program was carried out to the full, so that it was past mid-afternoon before John could get back to his own room and start to write. He felt better. He felt, as he said, wonderful; but time is time and it was with a worried look that he appeared for cocktails several minutes late.

He said, "Gavin, I just can't finish it in time!"

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Gavin said, "In the remote days of my infancy, I had an English nurse. She used to say, 'There's no such word as *cahn't* in the diction'ry, Mister Gavin.' I think she had something there . . ."

Mrs. Garroway said, "*You* can make it, John."

John grinned ruefully. "I guess I can," he said, and the topic wasn't touched upon again until the end of dinner when Gavin suddenly said, looking at his watch:

"Why don't you take your coffee upstairs and start in, me lad. I'll be on the beach in an hour and a half, and you can meet me there." He smiled at Mrs. Garroway. "If you don't mind my taking Gill for a farewell walk?" he said.

"Of course I don't!" Mrs. Garroway said.

"But look, Gavin —" John checked abruptly as Gavin looked at him with one eyebrow raised. "Okay, okay!" He picked up his coffee-cup, grinned, and said, "What a slave-driver!" to his mother and went quickly out of the room.

They heard his footsteps going up the stairs, and Gavin glanced at Mrs. Garroway apologetically. He said, "I'm sorry. Perhaps I shouldn't ride him so hard."

Mrs. Garroway said, "It's good for him, Gavin." She smiled. "And you know it."

Gavin said, "You're very understanding," and smiled back at her, gratefully.

Mrs. Garroway said, "Oh, my pills —" and reached for the bottle on the tray. She wasn't looking at Gavin as she unscrewed the top and shook out two capsules — and for one flickering instant his face paled and contorted, like the face of a man before making some tremendous and dangerous effort. But then he was himself again. As the woman put the capsules into her mouth and reached for her water glass, he said lightly, "Ah, yes, medicine time!" and pulled out his box of tablets —

And fumbled it, most realistically. The little box flew up into the air. He reached out, grabbing for it, and as he caught it, his hand came quickly down, his wrist striking against Mrs. Garroway's bottle of capsules and knocking it off the tray.

The capsules spilled over the table, some of them rolling. As if flustered, Gavin grabbed at the bottle itself, apparently righting it but in the process shaking out the remaining capsules. They were now strewn all around, yellow against the white of the cloth.

He said, "I'm so sorry — how clumsy of me!" and dropped his box of tablets back into his pocket with his right hand, holding the bottle in his left.

Mrs. Garroway laughed. She said, "No harm done," and began to collect the few capsules which had fallen onto the tray.

As she spoke, Gavin's right hand came out of his pocket, and hidden in its cupped palm was the capsule he had made himself during the night.

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He stood up, saying, "Now don't you bother. The least I can do is to collect them for you."

He was very busy — and very careful. The first capsule that went into the bottle was the one from his pocket, and he kept the bottle motionless until there were enough other capsules on top of the first to hold it in place at the bottom.

He was very busy — and very careful. He even counted the capsules as he picked them up. At the end he said, "That's seventy-six. . . . Would that be right?"

Mrs. Garroway smiled. "Just about, I should think. Please don't worry about it."

Gavin put the bottle back on the tray. He sat down, one hand casually in a jacket pocket. He let the extra capsule, which he had replaced with his, slip from his fingers inside the pocket. He saw Mrs. Garroway reaching for the cigarettes and was quick to hand them to her, then hold a light.

In a little while they moved into the living-room, and, as he had known she would, she said, "Is it too warm for a fire, do you think?"

"Not a bit," he replied easily. He crossed to the hearth and lit the gas jets under the logs. When he came back to his chair, the extra capsule was no longer in his pocket; in fact, it was no longer in existence — except as ashes.

They chatted — about the theater last night, about John, about Gill, about the new car Mrs. Garroway was buying. He forced himself to go slowly, but at last the moment arrived when he could properly glance at his watch in such a way that the woman was bound to say, as she did, "Isn't it about time for Gill's walk?"

Hearing his name, the dog jumped up, his head turned to look expectantly at his idol.

Gavin smiled at his hostess and spoke to the dog. "All right," he said. "All right, you bully!" He got to his feet. "I'll just go and change my shoes," he said, and Mrs. Garroway asked, "Do you think John's finished?"

Gavin tilted his head toward the ceiling, holding up a finger for silence. Faintly from above came the sound of a typewriter, working in hesitant bursts.

Gavin said, "He's trying, anyway."

"He'll get it done," Mrs. Garroway said. Gavin nodded and got himself out of the room, Gill ahead of him, as she picked up a book.

He went upstairs quietly. He could hear the boy's typewriter still going. He reached his room, shut himself into it, and dropped into a chair as if his legs suddenly had lost the strength to hold him upright. He found he was shaking, shaking all over, and determinedly he relaxed his whole body, dropping his arms down to his sides, thrusting out his feet, letting his head loll back as he drew deep breaths into his lungs.

Gill crouched beside the chair. After a minute or two he whined low in his throat.

Gavin sat up. He looked at his

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hands, then down at the dog. He said, "You blackguardly old villain!" and pulled himself out of the chair, quite steadily, went to the closet, found his beach shoes, and put them on.

As he tied the laces, his lips were moving, reflecting the simple arithmetic running through his head —

Seventy-six at two per day . . . that equals thirty-eight days . . . which is a week over a month . . . and I'll have been away from here so long I'll be just a friend of the bereaved . . .

He heard the whispers coming from his mouth and cut them off abruptly. He finished tying the lace of the second shoe, straightened, and called loudly, "Come on, Gill!" and marched out of the room and along the passage of the ell to the head of the stairs. He could still hear the typewriter stammering from John's room.

He ran down the stairs with Gill behind him. They left the house and struck out over the lawn, toward the steps to the beach. He was halfway across, the dog at his heels, when he saw Mrs. Garroway coming toward him. In the bright pale moonlight he could see her clearly. There was a bunch of roses in her hand, and she held them up as she neared him.

She said, "Growing flowers is a vice, almost. One can't ever leave the poor things alone."

Gavin said, "Maybe they prefer you to pick them," and she laughed softly, "You ought to have been a diplomat, Gavin!" Then she started for the house as he gave her a mock salute and went on toward the steps to the beach.

He reached them, and Gill fell behind. Gavin was now in full command of himself again; he was even whistling as he started down the steps at his usual trot.

He reached the bend in the cliff, where the steps took their only curve.

His whistling was cut off, in the middle of a bar. He seemed to stumble — and pitched outward and downward in a curving, head-foremost, terrifying arc. A strange sound, half scream, half shout, came from him — followed by an instant of eerie silence which mingled with the hush-hushing noise of the gentle surf and was then broken by a series of soft and crushing semi-liquid thuds from seventy feet below.

And then no sound — no sound at all except the surf.

But the cry that had come from him — that half-shouted scream — seemed to hang in the air as if it were fighting not to die away into nothingness. On the porch, Mrs. Garroway stood with her head half-turned. The sound seemed to have frozen her — but after a moment she dropped the flowers and ran toward the steps.

As she reached the head of them, another sound broke through the murmur of the surf. It was the lost and lonely and broken-hearted baying of a dog.

She started down, reached the curve, and stopped on the angled step. She bent quickly — and from the tough, two-inch-thick trunk of a

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laurel in the cliffside, unwound the double strand of garden wire that was wrapped around the laurel trunk and stretched across, four inches above the tread of the step, to a post on the other side.

One end free, she moved quickly to the far side of the step, starting to untie the other end of the wire from the post. From below, the howling of the dog mounted in crescendo — and through it she heard a window being flung open in the house above — and then John's voice shouting, "Gill — Gill! . . . Is there anyone down there? . . . What's going on?"

Mrs. Garroway stood up. The cliff-face hid her from the house. She called, frantically, "John — John — *hurry!* . . . Gavin's hurt!"

Her hands, steady and certain, coiled the wire neatly and slipped it into a side-pocket of her dress.

It was midnight — and it was all over.

Mrs. Garroway closed the front door behind Doctor Gundarsen and leaned against it, closing her eyes. Around her, the quietness of the house closed in.

She was tired — but it was all over. The body of Gavin Rhodes had been taken away. It was all over — the sirens, the ambulance, the questions, the sympathy. It was finished.

Upstairs, John was sleeping like a weary child under the shot of sedation Doctor Gundarsen had given him. Off in her room, the exhausted Mollie also slept soundly.

Mrs. Garroway was alone. She opened her eyes and stood away from the door and walked slowly across the hall to the shelves beside the telephone. On the bottom shelf, where it always stood, was her gardening basket. She took the coil of wire from the pocket of her dress and dropped it into the basket, on top of her pruning shears.

Then she walked along the passage to the dark kitchen. As she entered, she could hear the surf below. She switched on a light and crossed to the screen door of the back porch. She peered through the screen and could see Gill lying on his bed. She said, "Poor Gill!" But the dog gave no sign of hearing her. It lay there, seeming somehow to look smaller, its heavy head slumped hopelessly between outspread forepaws.

Mrs. Garroway crossed back to the sink. She turned on the cold water, then reach up to a cupboard, and took down the dark bottle which held her capsules.

For a long moment she looked at it meditatively — and then unscrewed the top, and reached under the sink and switched on the garbage disposal. The blades whirred grindingly as she upended the bottle over the sink and watched the capsules disappear.

She switched off the motor, and let the water run for a long moment while she put the top back on the bottle and put it into her pocket.

Then she turned off the water, turned off the light, and went slowly out . . .

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The second cornerstone of 1952 is the work of one of the most famous contemporary authors — the Irish dramatist, poet, and short-story writer, Lord Dunsany. It is a rare pleasure to nominate as

Queen's Quorum Number 109:
Lord Dunsany's
THE LITTLE TALES OF SMETHERS
AND OTHER STORIES
London: Jarrolds, 1952

This book is a 'tec treasure-trove — no less than 26 tales of crime and detection, all illumined by Lord Dunsany's charm and wit, and his highly individualistic style. The first nine stories record the exploits of Mr. Linley, including (for the first time in one of Dunsany's own books) that undeniable classic, "The Two Bottles of Relish"; and "The Speech" is without doubt one of the finest short-shorts written in our time.

To represent Lord Dunsany in this Queen's Quorum Issue we give you his newest short story — also a prize-winner in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. Unfortunately, it is not a Mr. Linley adventure, but it is the next best thing — a Jorkens story . . . a Jorkens tall tale about a man in a death cell and how he planned his escape . . .

NEAR THE BACK OF BEYOND

by LORD DUNSANY

WE WERE TALKING, ONE DAY AT the Billiards Club, of various vintages; and the talk, if not interesting, was at least growing vehement, as various members of our club supported the claims of wines that had especially inspired them. Then Jorkens joined in.

"Chateau Yquem," he said. "You cannot beat that."

"Oh, I don't know," said Terbut.

The remark stung Jorkens to a vigorous defense of that lovely wine.

"I don't know any wine that you could put against it," he said.

"Well," said another of us, "there is champagne."

"It can't beat Chateau Yquem," said Jorkens.

"Oh, I don't know," said Terbut again.

Jorkens looked at him. "I'll tell you what it did," he said.

"What Chateau Yquem did?" said Terbut.

"Yes," said Jorkens, with a smile.

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And then he told us this tale . . .

"I was a long way from here. It might have been under the slope of one of the Atlas Mountains, among the geraniums, with the Sahara lying all blue to the South; or it might have been in a farther part of that continent, among the little bushes of the Karoo; or again it may have been in a glade of a Mozambique forest. I am sorry I cannot tell you which. But you will understand why.

"Well, I came there one day in my travels; I came to the kind of house they have there, all alone in the loneliness, a little square whitewashed house built with bricks of dried mud — if it was in the North of Africa; or a thing with too much corrugated iron and a nice little shady stoep, if it was in the South; or a rondavo with deep thatch that had been bought from a Zulu, if it was more in the middle of Africa. But, whatever it was, I was glad to see that house, for I had not seen one for a week, and I went up to it with my little caravan and asked for a drink. By a drink, you understand, I mean whiskey.

"There was a white man living there, several days march from the next house, with only one wife so far as I could see; a man with a gray beard, an Englishman, and he had the whiskey too, and he gave me some. And it was good whiskey, and we got talking. And the more he talked and the more whiskey I drank, the more grateful I felt to him and the more curiosity I felt as to who he was and why he had come there. For if it wasn't the Back of Beyond, it was very near it.

"He was having a drink or two of whiskey with me and it made him talkative, as whiskey often does, and why shouldn't it? But being talkative is one thing, and being communicative is quite another. It didn't make him communicative. No. But the more I looked at him, and the more he talked, the more curious I grew as to why he was living there.

"My porters, who carried my little tent and its tentpole and pegs, and a wooden mallet to hammer the pegs in with, and a canvas bath and a camp-bed, and blankets and one thing and another, were all sitting down outside. And then an idea struck me: I had in one of those boxes two or three bottles for special occasions, when the loneliness of Africa might come down on one, as sometimes it does; and when it does, that loneliness is a mighty power, and few things can do much against it. Chateau Yquem is one that can.

"But it is not that quality I am claiming for it — not that it defeated the great loneliness of that vast land — but that it drew out of this man the story I am going to tell you. It stimulated his imagination to an incredible degree — if it did come from his imagination; and if every word of it was as true as it seemed, then that wine drew out from him what I think no man would ever have told for any other wine.

"This was the story, which he told to me after the third glass. The

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whiskey may have contributed its share, but that is negligible; it was that sweet wine that drew his story from him. I had begun to tell him the story of my life, until he began to remember that he had lived too, and after the third glass of Chateau Yquem he told me his story. His African wife was mostly out of the room, and I heard her tidying things in the little house, and when she came through the door I don't think she knew what we were talking about."

"I had an old uncle," the Englishman with the gray beard said, "a saintly old man in his exterior, which was neat dark clothes and a smile and some pious phrases, but the rest of him was pure villain; a thing that you could not say to anyone, because of that saintly appearance, which they would have been shocked to hear you malign. He was not a very clever villain: all the money he stole he lost before the end; for he was recognized as one of themselves by all the crooks he met, and as a very inferior one, and they soon got his gains out of him.

"No, he was a poor sort of villain, but his disguise was excellent.

"Well, one day in a room of his comfortable flat in a country town I told him what a villain he really was. He had robbed me enough, and I told him so. He smiled at me and pitied me. Well, that went to my head; it was too much for me. You never saw that smile or heard those pitying words. But I did, and I couldn't stand them. I stood up then and raised my voice. I am afraid I must have shouted, and I said a great many things to him that were true. God knows they were true, and they reached back over twenty years — a row of cunning swindles and never a year without one or more of them. I showed them to him all stripped bare of his silly suave words and his smile, and nasty objects they looked.

"He went on smiling at me, and every now and then he pitied me for my mistaken views and my uncharitable judgments and my childish lack of a proper understanding of business; and, oh, yes, ingratitude for all he had done for me. Well, he had done a lot, but nothing for me to be grateful for; and when he said that — still smiling, mind you — I could stand no more and I hit him. Not hard — in fact, it was no more than a shove with the flat of my hand. I only pushed him farther back in his chair, but I suppose the back of his head must have bumped a little against the wooden top of the chair. Nothing to hurt him. In fact, it didn't stop him talking about my ingratitude, but later they found a slight bruise there.

"I left soon after and went back to my small house in London. I knew I should never have touched him and I was ashamed of myself for having done it. I don't suppose he was ashamed of himself. I don't imagine he ever was, or he couldn't have lived as he did, cheating everyone who was foolish enough to trust him. But he knew he was completely found out now — I had told him enough for

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that. And when a man like him is found out, of course there is nothing more for him. Money that men will give to a saintly old man they won't give to a crook; and he had no other way of living except by getting other people's money. So while he was smiling at me and pitying me for my childish ignorance, he had really come to the deeps of despair, and what the old villain must have done then was to go and put his head in a gas oven.

"That's where they found him — dead. And the little bruise on the back of his head they said must have been caused when I put him into the gas oven. For that's what they said I did. A policeman called at my house the next day and told me I would be sorry to hear my uncle was dead. And then he asked me if I would come to the station with him, as the inspector believed I could help him. Help him to what, I asked? Just to help him, he replied. Well, I said I was always glad to help anyone if I could, though I didn't know what help I could give him. So the policeman thanked me and we went.

"I soon found out what the inspector wanted me to help him to do. He wanted me to help him to hang me. I never got back to my home from that police station. The inspector asked me a few questions, then arrested me, and I was put in a cell.

"I did a lot of thinking then. I had nothing else to do. The arrest would mean a trial, and the trial of course would mean an acquittal, for they do not hang innocent men. Then a policeman brought me a cup of tea, and after that I thought even harder, and it was then that the idea came to me: What if I were found guilty!

"For the first time I thought of the hangman.

"A murderer must think of the hangman sooner than that, even though he thinks he will never be found out, and I suppose a certain number of them never are hanged. But for me the thought came for the first time after I had been arrested, and I determined, whatever happened, I would not let them do that. How to escape it I did not see; I knew it would not be easy. But I determined to try, and if the verdict should go against me I determined I would not be hanged. Perhaps others have *hoped* the same, but I *determined* it. It was a great deal to determine, but you shall hear what happened. However mad my hope of escape, if convicted, it was no use even hoping if I could think of nowhere to go and had no means of getting there. Almost anywhere would do to go to, so long as it was far enough away, but the means of getting there was what really mattered. And those means were cash.

"I had a few shillings on me, which I rightly thought they would take away. But I still had my latchkey and the key of my safe at home. Those of course they would also take. But if I could secrete them and get back to my house, I should find plenty of cash there. Mind you, I had no plan whatever as yet of ever reaching my

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house, but, once there, I would have the necessary money, and my dream of escape could then be called a plan. The first step, then, was to keep possession of my keys; all other steps were but strides through dreamland. . . . My cell window was closed and well barred, opening on to a weedy space where groundsel and ragwort were growing."

"A bombed site?" I said.

"I am not giving you any dates to go by," he answered. "I didn't say a bombed site. It may have been long before the war, for all you know. . . . Anyway, weeds were growing there. I tied the two keys with some threads I pulled out of my tie and knotted together; then I knocked on the door until a policeman came and I asked him if I could have a little air. He looked at the bars of the window with a sort of smile, and said, yes, I could have the window open if I wanted. And he opened it just a few inches. But it was enough.

"There was one tall ragwort growing only a few yards away, and I aimed at that when the policeman had gone. I put my hand through the window and flicked my keys out and they fell among weeds quite close to the big ragwort. I did not think anyone would find them there. Boys would probably play there, but they would be looking for bigger game than my keys: some rival gang, or whatever monsters lurk in the imagination of a boy. I felt my keys would be safe from them, and nobody else would go there.

"Then I drank some more tea and did a lot more thinking. It was good strong tea and it helped me to think. They didn't count on that when they gave it to me. They wanted to hang me, not to help me to work out any way to dodge them. I didn't get very far, and of course I was starting at the wrong end. I was thinking out how to slip into my flat one night to burgle my own money, and how to get hold of my keys so as to be able to do that; and thinking it over all day, alone in that cell, it began to look as if the hangman and I, in spite of all my plans, were certain to meet. The evidence would be all against me. That any harm should come to that saintly old man would appear shocking to the jury, and they would start prejudiced."

"But couldn't you tell them," I said, "that he was anything but saintly. Or your counsel, rather. For you must have had a counsel if it came to a trial. Surely he would have brought all that to light."

"Oh, there was a trial all right," the gray-bearded Englishman replied. "But don't you see that proving the man was a villain was only plaiting my own rope? It provided a motive. My counsel, when I was allowed to see him in the cell, pointed that out to me. I said to him, 'The man is better dead.' And he said, 'Quite so. But you see that that gives the prosecution the very point they will want to prove — a motive. You see,' he said, 'you were present at the relevant time, and you admit you raised your voice. So

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you must have been heard. The only defense is that you could have had *no* reason for killing a good old man like that. Your loud voice may only have been insisting that the policy of the Government is all wrong, or that the law of gravity is overrated. Men do argue about such things, and quite heatedly. But show that he robbed you . . .' And he did not finish his sentence. Well, I was left with no defense at all by the time our talk was over, and I had to leave it all to him."

The old man fell silent in the hut, and nothing was heard but a slow sigh of the wind and the chirrup of African insects.

"Have one more glass," I said.

"Well, I will," he answered.

He took another glass of the Chateau Yquem, and it drew the rest of the tale from him.

"There was a trial," he went on. "Perhaps you remember it."

"No," I told him, quite truthfully.

"So much the better," he said.

"I am afraid I haven't read them all," I said rather apologetically.

"Quite right," he said. "They are brutal things. Especially this one. The counsel for the prosecution was a nasty fellow. And I didn't like the judge either. And I could see that he didn't like me. Who would, after all that the counsel for the prosecution had been saying? He drew a picture of a most philanthropic old man, and read out a complete list of his benefactions. Of course those sly robbers are always philanthropic: it's the safest way. The violent ones aren't clever enough to think of it, but it's part of the sly ones' game.

"And all the while I daren't show the other side of the game, the black side. My counsel wouldn't let me. I don't remember what his defense finally was — it seemed aimless to me, and it must have seemed just as aimless to the jury . . .

"Well, I could see they were bent on hanging me. And that's what they decided to do. There came a moment when hope utterly left me, and I despaired as I had never despaired before, and perhaps as few men have ever done. So that when the death sentence came, I had little more feeling left than a stone in a cold rain.

"They took me away to a prison in the county town in which the trial took place, the town in which the old villain had died. And then resentment flared up in me and I went back to my resolution that I would never let them hang me. I still had no plans except the ones I have told you, the ones at the far end of my escape. I was not put in the condemned cell, because my counsel appealed. He appealed against the judge's summing up. I could see nothing wrong with it. The judge had put quite clearly to the jury those points that the prosecution had made, and just as clearly the points of my counsel. Not that my counsel's were worth putting. But the appeal gained time, and time means a great deal to a man condemned to death.

"And still I had no workable plan, but simply wasted time in hoping.

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And one day I was taken out for a bit of a treat — to hear three judges reject my appeal. After that, you may think that there was no hope left. But you don't know what a lot of hope goes on in a condemned cell, mixed up with a lot of despair, and I was in the condemned cell now. I hoped for a reprieve from the Home Office; for, after all, I was innocent. But I no longer hoped hard enough to interfere with my determination to do whatever I could to stop their game. My plans for finding my keys and obtaining my cash and getting away to Africa were plans like blindfold chess, but the first step had to be taken in the very scene around me — the condemned cell: a bed, a chair, and a table clamped to the floor, and two men always watching me, night and day.

"To tell you all my thoughts, running from plan to plan and finding one after another useless, would be impossible. It would be impossible to tell you all the thoughts of any man in a condemned cell. Condemned men have nothing to do but think, and I can tell you from personal experience that those thoughts become very active, probably right up to the scaffold and even during the drop. That I can't say, for I stopped just short of that.

"To tell you the relevant things, I played a lot of draughts with one of my warders — he was used to doing that. One day, when I had got to know the two men pretty well — as well as you can know men who are waiting to see you hanged and won't say much about it — I told them the whole story. And I swore to them very solemnly that I was innocent. They nodded and understood me. There is a sincerity in truth that at a certain intensity speaks more clearly than all other evidence; and the two men saw that sincerity now and I could see that they believed me.

" 'Then help me to escape,' I said. 'I have thought how you might do it. But you may be able to think of a better plan and, if so, I will leave it to you.'

"But no, they just shook their heads.

" 'But you wouldn't hang an innocent man!' I said.

" 'It's the law,' they said. 'We don't like seeing anyone hanged. But it's the law.'

" 'But an *innocent* man!' I said.

" 'That makes no difference,' said one.

"They wouldn't say any more; but they'd said enough. I began to make other plans then. I asked one of them if he cared about card tricks, and he got me a pack of cards, and I showed him a few tricks, which entailed his writing down the names of several cards on paper. Thus I got his handwriting. Not that I thought I would need it, for I was still hoping for a reprieve. But I got his handwriting and I noted his build, which was more nearly that of mine than the other man's, or of either of the two who relieved them every few hours. And still I went on hoping. I had some

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nasty dreams at night. And don't think they were trifles, for you have probably never known anything like them. You have probably never awakened from a hideous dream — to find it perfectly true. I hope you never will. By day I played game after game with the same man. He wouldn't tell me his name, so I called him Jack, and he didn't seem to mind. He didn't mind anything, because to him I was clearly dead meat. The other one I called Ketch. I didn't bother to find names for the two that relieved them. Jack and Ketch were the ones I concentrated on. And still I went on hoping.

"But my own plans were getting ready too. And then one night the Governor came to my cell, shut the door, and told me he had bad news for me. It wasn't necessary to say any more. I thanked him, and he went away, and the last hope was gone. I had one day and two nights to live. Jack and Ketch were with me, and they said nothing. I gave them one more chance, but they paid no attention, and then I asked Jack to have another game of draughts. He was quite willing to play, and he never seemed to care who won. That, again, was because he looked on me as just dead meat.

" 'Jack,' I said, 'I am innocent.'

" 'Yes, I know,' he said, and he went on with the game.

"So I was to be hanged for murder. The State had judged me a murderer, and I was to pay the price of it in 36 hours. I still had one hope of escape. But if I couldn't escape, I decided to have my money's worth. Wasn't that fair? I ask you, wasn't that fair?"

"I don't know," I said.

"You don't know?" he repeated. "I was to pay the price. Wasn't I at least entitled to the goods?"

"What did you do?" I asked, preferring to ask him a question, rather than engage in a discussion on ethics.

"I watched the man Ketch," he said. "Jack was occupied with the draughtsboard, and I could deal with him any time, but I waited till Ketch was not looking. I flicked a draughtsman beyond him to the far end of the cell while Jack was making a move, and Ketch heard the rattle behind him and looked round. Then I hit Jack on the jaw. I hit him hard enough to prevent him making a noise, and then I hit Ketch before he had time to. In a little cell like that we were all close together. And there they both lay, and no sound out of either of them.

"No one had heard. And then the real work began. I had to make Jack unrecognizable, and, as I told you, I had to do to both of them what I was to be hanged for. Yes, they had judged me a murderer, so they got murder. It's what you expect from a murderer, isn't it?"

"You killed them!" I said.

"I had to," he replied. "I don't know if you think a murder in self-defense is worse than hanging an innocent man in the early morning . . ."

I wouldn't argue with him.

"Well, there they lay on the floor,"

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he went on, "and they were both beginning to stir. I had to do it. I had to batter their heads against the stone floor, and batter Jack's all to pulp. And I had to do it quickly. They look into prison cells through a peephole in the door. I never knew how often, because you couldn't see them from inside, but I believed they did it pretty often. And they might hear the noise of the heads on the stone floor. But they didn't.

"I had a lot to do. I had to strip Jack of his clothes and change with him, putting all mine on him, even my boots. And that wasn't the hardest work by any means. It wasn't enough to batter Jack's face. I had to batter my own too. That took some doing. It took so much doing that I doubt if anybody could do it to his own face without the stimulant I had — that drop in the chilly morning.

"Luckily Ketch had a knife in his pocket. That helped. I made an awful mess of both faces, Jack's and mine. And all the while I was dressing Jack, and battering and slashing my own face with Ketch's knife and one of Jack's boots, I was working against time. At any moment one of the men outside might peep through the hole in the door.

"The boots were the most awkward: mine were a little small for him; but I finally got them on him and laced them up. Lucky that it was not the other way about. His were a bad fit for me, but at least there was room in them. I used his boots a lot on my face before I put them on."

"It must have hurt horribly," I said.

"It was a close thing," he answered, "between that pain and my fear of the short walk to the rope in the morning; but the fear won and it kept me at it, hammering away at my face with the boot, and touching it up with Ketch's knife. I did a lot of work on my nose. In fact, it is not quite the same nose now, and never will be; and the rest of my face was a bloody mess. And all the while I was afraid of another warder at any moment looking in through the peephole.

"I had finished with my face, and just got on Jack's second boot, when I heard the door open. I threw myself on the floor, and in walked the parson. I said nothing, but only groaned, letting the scene speak for itself — the murderer dead, evidently killed by one of the warders, and one warder dead and the other warder badly knocked about. I was the other warder. The parson took it all in at a glance, looked at the two dead men with their battered skulls, then bent over me and was most sympathetic.

"So far so good. I muttered to the parson, not risking more than grunted words, for fear he might know my voice, a fear that turned out to be groundless. He soon went to get the doctor and to tell the Governor of the sad death of the man that they wanted to hang, and of the warder whom he had murdered, and to tell him of the poor brave warder who had killed the murderer while trying

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to save his comrade. That was me.

"Then the doctor came hurrying in. Jack had looked a healthy fellow to me, and I banked on the doctor not knowing his voice; and knowing his face wouldn't have been any good — there weren't enough features left. Nor of mine, for that matter. The doctor took a quick look round and I saw that he got the right picture — the picture I wanted him to get. I mumbled what had happened; I mean my account of it. I had left Ketch's knife on the floor and I now pointed to it.

" 'Used his knife on me,' I muttered.

"And as I said the word *his* I pointed to Ketch, whose name I didn't know. I didn't say much more after that, except to mumble as short answers as possible when the doctor asked me what had happened. I didn't want it to be thought that I could do much talking, in case anyone came along who knew my voice — the Governor, for instance; and he soon came to see me. But I was in the hospital by then, and too dazed to say much. The Governor understood. Well, that's not the right word for it, really. He understood what I wanted him to, which was that I was a man too sick to talk. My face was pretty well covered with plasters by then. You see, I had made the cuts in all the right places, chiefly under my eyes. My nose didn't matter: that was too much knocked about in any case, and my lips too, but my face was nicely concealed by the plasters that covered the cuts.

"A nurse looked after me, and I guessed that she wouldn't know me — I mean the warder that was now me — and I soon saw that she didn't. I told her I wanted sleep, and moaned that I must have it. I said that so that if anyone came in who knew the warder — the warder that was now me — I could shut my eyes and the nurse would tell them that I must not be disturbed. One warder did come in to see me, and that's what I did. He took a look at the plaster and bandages, and the nurse shooed him away.

"I stayed there all the next day, mumbling and pretending concussion, and the day after that — the very day they were going to hang me. I talked a lot to the doctor, quite clearly without mumbling, because he didn't know my voice. And what I said was that after the awful scene in that cell, when I fought with the murderer, and what with the pain in my head and one thing and another, I should never sleep again without nightmares; that I would go mad by day, if I couldn't get into the open air for a bit and away from the prison.

"He said, 'Oh, I'll give you a sleeping pill.'

"I said, 'No, I'll have nightmares if I sleep, and I'll go mad while I'm awake. Let me go for a walk in the open, and I think I can shake off this horrible nightmare. Come for a walk with me, sir, and you'll save my reason.'

"Well, I practically threatened to go mad there and then if I couldn't

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get out of the hospital. Doctors, you know, like to make cures, and they get their patients to help all they can, and here was I promising him a cure if only he would let me take a walk; so he gave in. He said that I could go for a short walk and he would come with me. I thanked him effusively.

"For the rest of that day I closed my eyes and spoke to nobody. That was the day they had meant to close them forever, wrapped up in quicklime. And I was an innocent man.

"The walk was to be the next day, and the doctor had promised to come to me in the morning. They got 'my' clothes from 'my' room, so that I could go for a walk in plain clothes. Nobody suspected anything yet. The only risk was of someone recognizing *me*, and I was sure I had taken care of that. There was to be an inquest as soon as I was well enough to give evidence. But I had told the doctor I must have that walk in the open country first, to steady my nerves, or I should not feel able to talk clearly enough to give evidence. I was more afraid of my voice being recognized than my face.

"In the morning, after breakfast, I got into Jack's plain clothes. They were tight, as his uniform had been too, but I got them buttoned. I had to — my life depended on it. If they had seen I wasn't Jack, they'd have soon guessed whom I really was. I emptied out the pockets of his uniform first. And what do you think I found there? Two pounds ten. With that I could get to London.

"And then the doctor came and found me dressed. He looked a little surprised, as though he had forgotten his promise. But I kept him to it, and away we went. I walked close to him as we came to the gate and kept my hand to my face as though I were in pain, which I was. There were always two warders at the gate. My face was still bandaged, but even so I was afraid of them. They would be sure to have known Jack well.

"It was a bad moment, but we got through. Down three streets we went, I looking very ill, very nervous, and on the verge of a breakdown. Then we came to the open country and I began to improve. I had only shuffled before, but I stepped out now. I spoke more clearly and seemed less confused. I told the doctor that I felt better now that we were away from the prison, and he was obviously pleased with his cure, and told me that I would soon feel better still. So I did. We were taking a walk to his house, which was only a mile past the town.

"When we got to the doctor's house I said I felt much better and could walk back alone. The doctor offered to drive me back to the prison in his car, but I said the walk would do me good, so he let me go.

"And now I was a free man.

"It was a long way from London, that prison; but I had Jack's two pounds ten. The first thing I did was to take off my bandages, which made me too conspicuous. The cuts had stopped bleeding, so I pulled off the plaster too. Then I walked away as

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fast as I could to the next railway station on the way to London, for I couldn't go back to the prison town.

"I bought a newspaper at the station and read the paper all the way to London, thinking that the less people saw of my face, the better. But I had one great advantage, which was that nobody was looking for my face. Later, when they missed Jack, they would be keeping an eye open for him, but not with the same keenness with which they would hunt for a man whom the law had convicted as a murderer. They would only be looking for a warder who had stayed away after his walk, instead of returning to the hospital.

"Well, I got to London at last, and there was risk again there. I had the wrong face for London — one that someone might possibly recognize even though it was a face no one was looking for. Just the same, I didn't like to have my meals indoors, because I wanted to keep my hat on — Jack's hat, that is — low down on my forehead. So I bought some bits of cooked meat and a loaf of bread, and ate them on a bench in a park, getting up and moving away when anybody came near. And I sat or walked about in the park for the rest of the day, till it got near closing time and was growing dark. And then I started to walk to the police station, where I had first gone to help the inspector."

"But —" I began.

"Oh, I didn't go in through the front door," he said. "That would have surprised them. No, I went to the street at the back, and walked up and down once or twice, till there was no one at either end, and then I slipped into the weedy patch that I told you about and went to the big ragwort near which I had thrown my keys. I lay down then among the weeds in the dark and searched for my keys with my fingers, and nobody could have seen me from the street.

"Though I knew just where they were, I had a horrible fear that I might not find them, or that somebody else had. I didn't know what I would do without any money, for I hadn't much left of Jack's. I felt safe enough so far as that window was concerned, which looked out from the cell: the police weren't going to sit in the cell, and anyone else who was there would have his own troubles and not bother about me. If anyone did see me from the street I decided to rely on my battered face to explain that I had had a bit of a fight with a pal on that patch of ground and that I was all right now.

"But nobody came. And the keys were there. Now I only had to go to my house. Nobody would be watching it: there was nothing to watch for — they thought they had me safe in the quicklime.

"I walked along the streets with the brim of my hat pulled low, and my handkerchief in my hand ready to blow my nose. I came to the door of my house, walked past it, then came back again and slipped in. I went straight to my safe, where I had as much as fifty pounds, and a gold

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watch. I pawned the gold watch later, out of England. It wouldn't have been safe to have pawned it there. They had taken nothing yet, and with my fifty pounds I could go where I liked. But the first place I went to was a hatters, to get a hat with a bigger brim and a better fit.

"I bought a pair of spectacles too, slightly tinted; not too dark — that might have attracted suspicion — and not too plain, because nobody buys plain glasses without a prescription. And immediately after that I went to a train and got well away from London. I came to a town by the sea and took lodgings; and one day I got a passport with a nice new name and a photograph, and I signed on as a hand in a ship and got far away from Europe. I like this continent: nobody here has ever accused me of a murder I didn't commit, or ever driven me to commit one in self-defense. I like the sun and this old girl, and the vast leisure of Africa."

He stopped and would say no more. I tried to give him another glass of the Chateau Yquem, but it had done all it could, and he would drink no more of it.

"You want all the details," he said, "details of times and places. Well, you won't get them."

He knew what that lovely wine could do with old secrets. And he would risk it no more . . .

"Oughtn't you to have told the police?" asked Terbut.

"Never a word," said Jorkens. "He had given me whiskey when I needed it most. I would never give away a man that did a thing like that."

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As in the case of 1952, the year 1953 also produced two cornerstones for QUEEN'S QUORUM. *The first was by the witty, erudite creator of Gervase Fen and the author of such keystones in The Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library as* THE MOVING TOYSHOP *(1946) and* LOVE LIES BLEEDING *(1948) . . .*

Queen's Quorum Number 110:
Edmund Crispin's
BEWARE OF THE TRAINS
London: Gollancz, 1953

Instead of selecting a story from BEWARE OF THE TRAINS, *we have decided to represent Mr. Crispin with one of his latest adventures about Gervase Fen — a tale of special significance today and one that you might have read about in this morning's newspaper.*

A MESSAGE TO HERR DIETRICH

by EDMUND CRISPIN

BY THE CLOSE OF HERR DIETRICH'S peroration Gervase Fen had become decidedly restive. The hall was chilly and airless, and the first delightful impact of Communism's musty Victorian-sounding zoological similes — "Fascist jackal," "Capitalist leeches" — had grown stale with repetition, and in general Fen felt that he had had enough of political slumming to last him for quite some time to come. He waited while an inflammatory question about the American President was asked and lengthily answered — Eisenhower, it seemed (pronounced by Herr Dietrich "Eisssenhoer" with all the sibilance of extreme hatred) was directly responsible, along with the vultures of Wall Street, for Germany's continued partition; then Fen nudged his companion and crept out. In the street, breathing soot-laden Stepney air, he lit a cigarette. And presently the other — whose name was Campbell and who belonged to Scotland Yard's Special Branch — joined him there.

"Well, thanks for bringing me," said Fen. "Do you have to go back?"

Campbell shook his head. "No, I don't think it's necessary. Apart from riots with Fascists, nothing interesting ever happens at these public do's. What did you think of Dietrich?"

Fen paused a moment before replying. Then he said slowly, "I suppose that really *was* Dietrich?"

Campbell stared. "Good heavens,

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yes. He's far too well-known, and far too distinctive-looking, for them to dream of trying to substitute anyone else. Anyway, why should they? From the point of view of the Stepney Communist party, he's a great catch."

"Yes, I suppose so. . . . That sort of man," Fen added pensively, "would have a lot of useful information to give us about what's going on in East Berlin."

"Would but won't," said Campbell. "You can take it as read that he'll be kept surrounded by watchful Comrades the whole time he's over here. Since Petrov, they've been very cagey about that sort of thing. So that even if Dietrich did feel inclined to ask for asylum, he'd have to do a tricky escape act first. . . . Not," Campbell went on, probing delicately, "that you have any reason to suppose —"

"Nothing that would convince your superiors, no," said Fen with a grin. "Just the same, I should like to know where Dietrich and his friends are likely to go when the meeting's over."

Campbell regarded him with suspicion. "Look here, you be careful," he said. "Some of these people are genuinely dangerous. If you're thinking of trying to strike up an acquaintance —"

"I am not," said Fen truthfully. "I'm just curious, that's all. How do the Comrades relax? Will they go to a pub, I mean, or —"

"They'll probably go to that pub over there." Campbell pointed across the road. "*The Grapes.*"

"Good. I can do with a drink. And don't you worry about me. I'm quite capable of looking after myself."

Campbell contemplated him for a moment, then nodded. "Yes," he said. "I believe you are. Just don't start heiling Mosley when you're in *The Grapes*, that's all. The clients don't much like that sort of thing." He smiled and waved and went.

Fen had no intention of heiling Mosley, in *The Grapes* or anywhere else. He bought beer and settled down by the bar to read the evening paper, with the Light Programme on the radio burbling innocuously at his elbow; and after half an hour or so was rewarded by the arrival of Dietrich with three English Comrades — a young fanatical-looking one, an older and decidedly tough one, and a clerkly fellow in rimless glasses. They carried their drinks to a table in the corner, and Fen began taking serious stock of the situation.

It was unpromising, he found. Dietrich was obviously being closely watched, and it was clear that conversational overtures from a stranger like Fen would arouse instant suspicion. Some communication with Dietrich there plainly must be, however, if anything were to be accomplished. As to how —

". . . opens our programme of Music for the Multitude," said the radio, "with that rousing. . . ."

At which Fen sat upright abruptly on his stool, and for the first time that evening favored the Light Programme

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with the whole of his attention. For he had recognized the announcer's voice. By one of those coincidences which are so much commoner in life than in fiction, this particular announcer was an ex-pupil of Fen's. Fen knew, moreover, that he had quarreled with the BBC and was leaving them quite shortly. And that being so —

There was a telephone box a short way along the road. Fen left the bar, and after a rapid reconnaissance of the back of the inn's premises, made two calls.

When he returned to *The Grapes*, Fen was gratified to find everything as before. He resumed his position at the bar, and presently, when the second item of Music for the Multitude had reached its tawdry conclusion, Fen stretched out his hand, as if idly, to twist the radio's volume control.

"We come now," said the announcer, "to a popular march based on the old German folk-tune *Der hohe Herr am Bar wird Ihnen winken: dann, deutscher Kamerad, gehen Sie bitte sofort in die Herren.* Ladies and gentlemen — *Anchors Aweigh!*"

A great splurge of brass and cymbals filled the room. At a glare from the landlord, Fen hurriedly turned the volume down again and went back to his beer. Perhaps ten minutes later, a very large, very drunk young man appeared and demanded a double whiskey. With an air of great self-approval, he drank about half of this. Then all at once his expression altered; he mumbled something; holding a hand to his mouth, he made hurriedly for one of the doors at the back.

"There's another of them can't take it," said Fen to the landlord. The landlord nodded, and with mournful emphasis Fen nodded back.

Herr Dietrich got to his feet. Now he was heading for the door the young man had disappeared through. The tough middle-aged Comrade was following, while the younger one slipped out into the street — no doubt with a view to stationing himself strategically under a rear window.

Fen finished his drink and left. In the narrow deserted street behind *The Grapes* he was in time to see a car's tail-light vanishing. The youthful Comrade, though unlikely to recover consciousness for some minutes, was not seriously injured, Fen thought. He went and found himself a taxi.

"Most irregular," said Sir Somebody two hours later, in an office of the Special Branch whose whereabouts is not known to the general public. "Two respected citizens of Stepney with great stunning bruises on the backs of their heads, and no trace of the miscreants. . . ."

"Undergraduates, perhaps," Fen suggested. "For instance, I happen to know that a couple of pupils of mine are in London at the moment —"

"No, they'll never be caught." Sir Somebody was firm. "Not a chance of it, I'm afraid. As to this business

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of kidnaping an important personage from East Berlin . . . well, really. . . ."

Herr Dietrich grinned all over his broad, florid face. "Such a very good plan," he murmured. "At the first, you realize, I am a little surprised that it is carried out by amateurs. But then I understand that most probably my hint is too slight to be acted on by your — what do you call it? — your big brass. I am surrounded all the time, so I do not dare to do anything more emphatic, but I hope that perhaps it will be thought I am a masquerader, for always at these political meetings there are police listening. When I hear this instruction from the BBC —"

"Which reminds me." Fen reached for the telephone, dialed a number, asked for a certain extension, spoke, listened, chuckled.

"It seems," he told them, ringing off, "that quite a surprising number of German-speaking people listen to Music for the Multitude. They've all been ringing up wanting to know why the BBC should suppose that *Anchors Aweigh* is based on the German folksong. *The tall man at the bar will give you a signal; then, German Comrade, please go straight to the Gents.*"

Sir Somebody laughed. But Campbell, the fourth member of the party, said rather irritably, "I still don't see it; I still don't see how you could tell, from that meeting, that Herr Dietrich was wanting to stay in this country."

"Oh, simple," said Fen. "He pronounced 'Eisenhower' wrong. Despite the spelling of the last two syllables, it's a name of German origin, of course, which every German recognizes as such. What's more, we in England and America pronounce it exactly as a German would. 'Eisssenhoer,' from a Berliner, was just ridiculous. Either Herr Dietrich wasn't Herr Dietrich at all, or else he was relying on the Stepney Communist Party's ignorance of German — as I relied on it in arranging for that broadcast message — to send out a distress signal. Ike to the rescue!"

Note:

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The second cornerstone of 1953 is the work of a sensationally successful author whose stories have already been compared with the tales of such "greats" as Saki, Ring Lardner, O. Henry, Poe, Ambrose Bierce, A. E. Coppard . . . and with John Collier and Lord Dunsany, both of whom, by an interesting coincidence, are represented in the Queen's Quorum section of this issue. It is a privilege to nominate as

Queen's Quorum Number 111:
Roald Dahl's
SOMEONE LIKE YOU
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953

H. H. Holmes has said of John Collier that his stories "are concerned with the improbable, the impossible, the outrageous . . . and they are written with a combined dexterity of narrative technique, a force of imagination, and a precision of prose style." The same could be said of Roald Dahl's best tales, as you learned for yourselves when you read the three Dahl stories previously reprinted in EQMM — "Taste," "A Connoisseur's Revenge," and "Lamb to the Slaughter." Now try a newer Dahl chiller — about a woman who had "an almost pathological fear" of being late . . . with all the infuriating suspense such an obsession can generate . . .

THE WAY UP TO HEAVEN

by ROALD DAHL

ALL HER LIFE, MRS. FOSTER HAD HAD an almost pathological fear of missing a train, a plane, a boat, or even a theatre curtain. In other respects, she was not a particularly nervous woman, but the mere thought of being late on occasions like these would throw her into such a state of nerves that she would begin to twitch. It was nothing much — just a tiny vellicating muscle in the corner of the left eye, like a secret wink — but the annoying thing was that it refused to disappear until an hour or so after the train or plane or whatever it was had been safely caught.

It is really extraordinary how in certain people a simple apprehension about a thing like catching a train can grow into a serious obsession. At least half an hour before it was time to leave the house for the station, Mrs.

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Foster would step out of the elevator all ready to go, with hat and coat and gloves, and then, being quite unable to sit down, she would flutter and fidget about from room to room until her husband, who must have been well aware of her state, finally emerged from his privacy and suggested in a cool, dry voice that perhaps they had better get going now, had they not?

Mr. Foster may possibly have had a right to be irritated by this foolishness of his wife's, but he could have had no excuse for increasing her misery by keeping her waiting unnecessarily. Mind you, it is by no means certain that this is what he did, yet whenever they were to go somewhere, his timing was so accurate — just a minute or two late, you understand — and his manner so bland that it was hard to believe he wasn't purposely inflicting a nasty, private little torture of his own on the unhappy lady. And one thing he must have known — that she would never dare to call out and tell him to hurry. He had disciplined her too well for that. He must also have known that if he was prepared to wait even beyond the last moment of safety, he could drive her nearly into hysterics. On one or two special occasions in the later years of their married life, it seemed almost as though he had *wanted* to miss the train simply in order to intensify the poor woman's suffering.

Assuming (though one cannot be sure) that the husband was guilty, what made his attitude doubly unreasonable was the fact that with the exception of this one small, irrepressible foible, Mrs. Foster was and always had been a good and loving wife. For over 30 years, she had served him loyally and well. There was no doubt about this. Even she, a very modest woman, was aware of it, and although she had for years refused to let herself believe that Mr. Foster would ever consciously torment her, there had been times recently when she had caught herself beginning to wonder.

Mr. Foster, who was nearly 70 years old, lived with his wife in a large six-story house on East Sixty-second Street, and they had four servants. It was a gloomy place, and few people came to visit them. But on this particular morning in January, the house had come alive and there was a great deal of bustling about. One maid was distributing bundles of dust sheets to every room, while another was draping them over the furniture. The butler was bringing down suitcases and putting them in the hall. The cook kept popping up from the kitchen to have a word with the butler, and Mrs. Foster herself, in an old-fashioned fur coat and with a black hat on the top of her head, was flying from room to room and pretending to supervise these operations. Actually, she was thinking of nothing at all except that she was going to miss her plane if her husband didn't come out of his study soon and get ready.

"What time is it, Walker?" she said to the butler as she passed him.

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"It's ten minutes past 9, Madam."

"And has the car come?"

"Yes, Madam, it's waiting. I'm just going to put the luggage in now."

"It takes an hour to get to Idlewild," she said. "My plane leaves at 11. I have to be there half an hour beforehand for the formalities. I shall be late. I just *know* I'm going to be late."

"I think you have plenty of time, Madam," the butler said kindly. "I warned Mr. Foster that you must leave at 9:15. There's still another five minutes."

"Yes, Walker, I know, I know. But get the luggage in quickly, will you please?"

She began walking up and down the hall, and whenever the butler came by, she asked him the time. This, she kept telling herself, was the *one* plane that she must not miss. It had taken months to persuade her husband to allow her to go. If she missed it, he might easily decide that she should cancel the whole thing. And the trouble was that he insisted on coming to the airport to see her off.

"Dear God," she said aloud, "I'm going to miss it. I know, I know, I *know* I'm going to miss it." The little muscle beside the left eye was twitching madly now. The eyes themselves were very close to tears.

"What time is it, Walker?"

"It's eighteen minutes past, Madam."

"Now I really *will* miss it!" she cried. "Oh, I wish he would come!"

This was an important journey for Mrs. Foster. She was going all alone to Paris to visit her daughter, her only child, who was married to a Frenchman. Mrs. Foster didn't care much for the Frenchman, but she was fond of her daughter, and, more than that, she had developed a great yearning to set eyes on her three grandchildren. She knew them only from the many photographs that she had received and that she kept putting up all over the house. They were beautiful, these children. She doted on them, and each time a new picture arrived, she would carry it away and sit with it for a long time, staring at it lovingly and searching the small faces for signs of that old satisfying blood likeness that meant so much. And now, lately, she had come more and more to feel that she did not really wish to live out her days in a place where she could not be near these children, and have them visit her, and take them for walks, and buy them presents, and watch them grow.

She knew, of course, that it was wrong and, in a way, disloyal to have thoughts like these while her husband was still alive. She knew also that although he was no longer active in his many enterprises, he would never consent to leave New York and live in Paris. It was a miracle that he had ever agreed to let her fly over there alone for six weeks to visit them. But, oh, how she wished she could live there always, and be close to them!

"Walker, what time is it?"

"Twenty-two minutes past, Madam."

As he spoke, a door opened and Mr.

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Foster came into the hall. He stood for a moment, looking intently at his wife, and she looked back at him — at this diminutive but still quite dapper old man with the huge bearded face that bore such an astonishing resemblance to those old photographs of Andrew Carnegie.

"Well," he said, "I suppose perhaps we'd better get going fairly soon if you want to catch that plane."

"*Yes*, dear — *yes!* Everything's ready. The car's waiting."

"That's good," he said. With his head over to one side, he was watching her closely. He had a peculiar way of cocking the head and then moving it in a series of small, rapid jerks. Because of this and because he was clasping his hands up high in front of him, near the chest, he was somehow like a squirrel standing there — a quick, clever old squirrel from the Park.

"Here's Walker with your coat, dear. Put it on."

"I'll be with you in a moment," he said. "I'm just going to wash my hands."

She waited for him, and the tall butler stood beside her, holding the coat and the hat.

"Walker, will I miss it?"

"No, Madam," the butler said. "I think you'll make it all right."

Then Mr. Foster appeared again, and the butler helped him on with his coat. Mrs. Foster hurried outside and got into the hired Cadillac. Her husband came after her, but he walked down the steps of the house slowly, pausing halfway to observe the sky and to sniff the cold morning air.

"It looks a bit foggy," he said as he sat down beside her in the car. "And it's always worse out there at the airport. I shouldn't be surprised if the flight's cancelled already."

"Don't say that, dear — *please*."

They didn't speak again until the car had crossed over the river to Long Island.

"I arranged everything with the servants," Mr. Foster said. "They're all going off today. I gave them half pay for six weeks and told Walker I'd send him a telegram when we wanted them back."

"Yes," she said. "He told me."

"I'll move into the club tonight. It'll be a nice change staying at the club."

"Yes, dear. I'll write to you."

"I'll call in at the house occasionally to see that everything's all right and to pick up the mail."

"But don't you really think Walker should stay there all the time to look after things?" she asked meekly.

"Nonsense. It's quite unnecessary. And anyway, I'd have to pay him full wages."

"Oh, yes," she said. "Of course."

"What's more, you never know what people get up to when they're left alone in a house," Mr. Foster announced, and with that he took out a cigar and, after snipping off the end with a silver cutter, lit it with a gold lighter.

She sat still in the car with her hands clasped together tight under

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the rug. "Will you write to me?" she asked.

"I'll see," he said. "But I doubt it. You know I don't hold with letter writing unless there's something specific to say."

"Yes, dear, I know. So don't you bother."

They drove on, along Queens Boulevard, and as they approached the flat marshland on which Idlewild is built, the fog began to thicken and the car had to slow down.

"Oh, dear!" cried Mrs. Foster. "I'm *sure* I'm going to miss it now! What time is it?"

"Stop fussing," the old man said. "It doesn't matter anyway. It's bound to be cancelled now. They never fly in this sort of weather. I don't know why you bothered to come out."

She couldn't be sure, but it seemed to her that there was suddenly a new note in his voice, and she turned to look at him. It was difficult to observe any change in his expression under all that hair. The mouth was what counted. She wished, as she had so often before, that she could see the mouth clearly. The eyes never showed anything except when he was in a rage.

"Of course," he went on, "if by any chance it *does* go — I agree with you — you'll be certain to miss it now. Why don't you resign yourself to that?"

She turned away and peered through the window at the fog. It seemed to be getting thicker as they went along, and now she could only just make out the edge of the road and the margin of grassland beyond it. She knew that her husband was still looking at her. She glanced back at him again, and this time she noticed with a kind of horror that he was staring intently at the little place in the corner of her left eye where she could feel the muscle twitching.

"Won't you?" he said.

"Won't I what?"

"Be sure to miss it now if it goes. We can't drive fast in this muck."

He didn't speak to her any more after that. The car crawled on and on. The driver had a yellow lamp directed onto the edge of the road, and this helped him to keep going. Other lights, some white and some yellow, kept coming out of the fog toward them, and there was an especially bright one that followed close behind them all the time.

Suddenly, the driver stopped the car.

"There!" Mr. Foster cried. "We're stuck. I knew it."

"No, sir," the driver said, turning round. "We made it. This is the airport."

Without a word, Mrs. Foster jumped out and hurried through the main entrance into the building. There was a mass of people inside, mostly disconsolate passengers standing around the ticket counters. She pushed her way through and spoke to the clerk.

"Yes," he said. "Your flight is temporarily postponed. But please don't go away. We're expecting this weather to clear any moment."

She went back to her husband, who

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was still sitting in the car, and told him the news. "But don't you wait, dear," she said. "There's no sense in that."

"I won't," he answered. "So long as the driver can get me back. Can you get me back, driver?"

"I think so," the man said.

"Is the luggage out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Goodbye, dear," Mrs. Foster said, leaning into the car and giving her husband a small kiss on the coarse gray fur of his cheek.

"Goodbye," he answered. "Have a good trip."

The car drove off, and Mrs. Foster was left alone.

The rest of the day was a sort of nightmare for her. She sat for hour after hour on a bench, as close to the airline counter as possible, and every thirty minutes or so she would get up and ask the clerk if the situation had changed. She always received the same reply — that she must continue to wait, because the fog might blow away at any moment. It wasn't until after 6 in the evening that the loudspeakers finally announced that the flight had been cancelled until 11 o'clock the next morning.

Mrs. Foster didn't quite know what to do when she heard this news. She stayed sitting on her bench for at least another half hour, wondering, in a tired, hazy sort of way, where she might go to spend the night. She hated to leave the airport. She didn't wish to see her husband. She was terrified that in one way or another he would eventually manage to prevent her from getting to France. She would have liked to remain just where she was, sitting on the bench the whole night through. That would be the safest. But she was already exhausted, and it didn't take her long to realize that this was a ridiculous thing for an elderly lady to do. So in the end she went to a phone and called the house.

Her husband, who was on the point of leaving for the club, answered it himself. She told him the news, and asked whether the servants were still there.

"They've all gone," he said.

"In that case, dear, I'll just get myself a room somewhere for the night. And don't you bother yourself about it at all."

"That would be foolish," he said. "You've got a large house here at your disposal. Use it."

"But, dear, it's *empty*."

"Then I'll stay with you myself."

"There's no food in the house. There's nothing."

"Then eat before you come in. Don't be so stupid, woman. Everything you do, you seem to want to make a fuss about it."

"Yes," she said. "I'm sorry. I'll get myself a sandwich here, and then I'll come on in."

Outside, the fog had cleared a little, but it was still a long, slow drive in the taxi and she didn't arrive back at the house on Sixty-second Street until fairly late.

Her husband emerged from his

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study when he heard her coming in. "Well," he said, standing by the study door, not moving across the hall to meet her, "how was Paris?"

"We leave at 11 in the morning," she answered. "It's definite."

"You mean if the fog clears."

"It's clearing now. There's a wind coming up."

"You look tired," he said. "You must have had an anxious day."

"It wasn't very comfortable. I think I'll go straight to bed."

"I've ordered a car for the morning," he said. "Nine o'clock."

"Oh, thank you, dear. And I certainly hope you're not going to bother to come to see me off."

"No," he said slowly. "I don't think I will. But there's no reason why you shouldn't drop me at the club on your way."

She looked at him, and at that moment he seemed to be standing a long way off from her, beyond some borderline. He was suddenly so small and far away that she couldn't be sure what he was doing, or what he was thinking, or even what he was.

"The club is downtown," she said. "It isn't on the way to the airport."

"But you'll have plenty of time, my dear. Don't you want to drop me at the club?"

"Oh, yes — of course."

"That's good. Then I'll see you in the morning at 9."

She went up to her bedroom on the third floor, and she was so exhausted from her day that she fell asleep soon after she lay down.

Next morning, Mrs. Foster was up early, and by 8:30 she was downstairs and ready to leave.

Shortly after 9, her husband appeared. "Did you make any coffee?" he asked.

"No, dear. I thought you'd get a nice breakfast at the club. The car is here. It's been waiting. I'm all ready to go."

They were standing in the hall — they always seemed to be meeting in the hall nowadays — she with her hat and coat and purse, he in a curiously cut Edwardian jacket with high lapels.

"Your luggage?"

"It's at the airport."

"Ah, yes," he said. "Of course. And if you're going to take me to the club first, I suppose we'd better get going fairly soon, hadn't we?"

"Yes!" she cried. "Oh, yes — *please!*"

"I'm just going to get a few cigars. I'll be right with you. You get in the car."

She turned and went out to where the chauffeur was standing, and he opened the car door for her as she approached.

"What time is it?" she asked him.

"About 9:15."

Mr. Foster came out five minutes later, and, watching him as he walked slowly down the steps, she noticed that his legs were like goat's legs in those narrow stovepipe trousers that he wore. As on the day before, he paused halfway down to sniff the air and to examine the sky. The weather was still not quite clear, but there was

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a wisp of sun coming through the mist.

"Perhaps you'll be lucky this time," he said as he settled himself beside her in the car.

"Hurry, please," she said to the chauffeur. "Don't bother about the rug. I'll arrange the rug. Please get going. I'm late."

The man went back to his seat behind the wheel and started the engine.

"*Just* a moment!" Mr. Foster said suddenly. "Hold it a moment, chauffeur, will you?"

"What is it, dear?" She saw him searching the pockets of his overcoat.

"I had a little present I wanted you to take to Ellen," he said. "Now, where on earth is it? I'm sure I had it in my hand as I came down."

"I never saw you carrying anything. What sort of present?"

"A little box wrapped up in white paper. I forgot to give it to you yesterday. I don't want to forget it today."

"A little box!" Mrs. Foster cried. "I never saw any little box!" She began hunting frantically in the back of the car.

Her husband continued searching through the pockets of his coat. Then he unbuttoned the coat and felt around in his jacket. "Confound it," he said. "I must've left it in my bedroom. I won't be a moment."

"Oh, *please!*" she cried. "We haven't got time! *Please* leave it! You can *post* it. It's only one of those silly combs anyway. You're always giving her combs."

"And what's wrong with combs, may I ask?" he said, furious that she should have forgotten herself for once.

"Nothing, dear, I'm sure. But . . ."

"Stay there!" he commanded. "I'm going to get it."

"Be quick, dear! Oh, *please* be quick!"

She sat still, waiting and waiting.

"Chauffeur, what time is it?"

The man had a wrist watch, which he consulted. "I make it nearly 9:30."

"Can we get to the airport in an hour?"

"Just about."

At this point, Mrs. Foster suddenly spotted a corner of something white wedged down in the crack of the seat on the side where her husband had been sitting. She reached over and pulled out a small paper-wrapped box, and at the same time she couldn't help noticing that it was wedged down firm and deep, as though with the help of a pushing hand.

"Here it is!" she cried. "I've found it! Oh, dear, and now he'll be up there forever searching for it! Chauffeur, quickly — run in and call him down, will you please?"

The chauffeur, a man with a small, rebellious Irish mouth, didn't care very much for any of this, but he climbed out of the car and went up the steps to the front door of the house. Then he turned and came back. "Door's locked," he announced. "You got a key?"

"Yes — wait a minute." She began hunting madly in her purse. The little face was screwed up tight with anxiety, the lips pushed outward.

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"Here it is! No — I'll go myself. It'll be quicker. I know where he'll be."

She hurried out of the car and up the steps to the front door, holding the key in one hand. She slid the key into the keyhole and was about to turn it — and then she stopped. Her head came up, and she stood there absolutely motionless, her whole body arrested right in the middle of all this hurry to turn the key and get into the house, and she waited — five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten seconds, she waited. The way she was standing there, with her head in the air and the body so tense, it seemed as though she were listening for the repetition of some sound that she had heard or imagined she had heard a moment before from a place far away inside the house.

Yes — quite obviously she was listening. Her whole attitude was a *listening* one. She appeared actually to be moving one of her ears closer and closer to the door. Now it was right up against the door, and for still another few seconds she remained in that position, head up, ear to door, hand on key, about to enter but not entering, trying instead, or so it seemed, to hear and to analyze these sounds that were coming faintly from this place deep within the house.

Then, all at once, she sprang to life again. She withdrew the key from the door and came running back down the steps.

"It's too late!" she cried to the chauffeur. "I can't wait for him, I simply can't. I'll miss the plane. Hurry now, driver, hurry! To the airport!"

The chauffeur, had he been watching her closely, might have noticed that her face had turned absolutely white and that the whole expression had suddenly altered. There was no longer that rather soft and silly look. A peculiar hardness had settled itself upon the features. The little mouth, usually so flabby, was now tight and thin, the eyes were bright, and the voice, when she spoke, carried a new note of authority.

"Hurry, driver, hurry!"

"Isn't your husband traveling with you?" the man asked, astonished.

"Certainly not! I was only going to drop him at the club. It won't matter. He'll understand. He'll get a cab! Don't sit there talking, man. *Get going!* I've got a plane to catch for Paris!"

With Mrs. Foster urging him from the back seat, the man drove fast all the way, and she caught her plane with a few minutes to spare. Soon she was high up over the Atlantic, reclining comfortably in her airplane chair, listening to the hum of the motors, heading for Paris at last. The new mood was still with her. She felt remarkably strong and, in a queer sort of way, wonderful. She was a trifle breathless with it all, but this was more from pure astonishment at what she had done than anything else, and as the plane flew farther and farther away from New York and East Sixty-second Street, a great sense of calm-

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ness began to settle upon her. By the time she reached Paris, she was just as strong and cool and calm as she could wish.

She met her grandchildren, and they were even more beautiful in the flesh than in their photographs. They were like angels, she told herself, so beautiful they were. And every day she took them for walks, and fed them cakes, and bought them presents, and told them charming stories.

Once a week, on Tuesdays, she wrote a letter to her husband — a nice, chatty letter — full of news and gossip, which always ended with the words, "Now be sure to take your meals regularly, dear, although this is something I'm afraid you may not be doing when I'm not with you."

When the six weeks were up, everybody was sad that she had to return to America, to her husband. Everybody, that is, except her. Surprisingly, she didn't seem to mind as much as one might have expected, and when she kissed them all goodbye, there was something in her manner and in the things she said that appeared to hint at the possibility of a return in the not too distant future.

However, like the faithful wife she was, she did not overstay her time. Exactly six weeks after she had arrived, she sent a cable to her husband and caught the plane back to New York.

Arriving at Idlewild, Mrs. Foster was interested to observe that there was no car to meet her. It is possible that she might even have been a little amused. But she was extremely calm and did not overtip the porter who helped her into a taxi with her baggage.

New York was colder than Paris, and there were lumps of dirty snow lying in the gutters of the streets. The taxi drew up before the house on Sixty-second Street, and Mrs. Foster persuaded the driver to carry her two large cases to the top of the steps. Then she paid him off and rang the bell. She waited, but there was no answer. Just to make sure, she rang again, and she could hear it tinkling shrilly far away in the pantry, at the back of the house. But still no one came.

So she took out her own key and opened the door herself.

The first thing she saw as she entered was a great pile of mail lying on the floor where it had fallen after being slipped through the letter hole. The place was dark and cold. A dust sheet was still draped over the grandfather clock. In spite of the cold, the atmosphere was peculiarly oppressive, and there was a faint but curious odor in the air that she had never smelled before.

She walked quickly across the hall and disappeared for a moment around the corner to the left, at the back. There was something deliberate and purposeful about this action; she had the air of a woman who is off to investigate a rumor or to confirm a suspicion. And when she returned a few seconds later, there was a little

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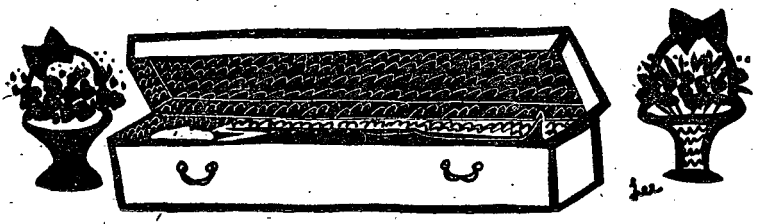
glimmer of satisfaction on her face.

She paused in the center of the hall, as though wondering what to do next. Then, suddenly, she turned and went across into her husband's study. On the desk she found his address book, and after hunting through it for a while she picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Hello," she said. "Listen — this is 9 East Sixty-second Street. . . . Yes, that's right. Could you send someone round as soon as possible, do you think? . . . Yes, it seems to be stuck between the second and third floors. At least that's where the indicator's pointing. . . . Right away? Oh, that's very kind of you. You see, my legs aren't any too good for walking up a lot of stairs. Thank you so much. Goodbye."

She replaced the receiver and sat there at her husband's desk, patiently waiting for the man who would be coming very soon to repair the elevator.



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The year 1954 boasted only one cornerstone for QUEEN'S QUORUM, *but critics were almost unanimous in their praise of and delight in that book. It was written by the creator of Inspector Appleby and the author of* LAMENT FOR A MAKER *(1938) . . .*

Queen's Quorum Number 112:
Michael Innes's
APPLEBY TALKING
London: Gollancz, 1954

The book, containing twenty-three detective short stories, was published in the United States as DEAD MAN'S SHOES *(New York: Dodd, Mead, 1954).*

Here again, instead of reprinting a story from an already published book, we give you one of Mr. Innes's newest investigations of Inspector Appleby — and one of his most ingenious . . .

So, for the first four years of the current decade (1951–1960), six cornerstones have been added to QUEEN'S QUORUM. *It might be useful to consolidate the list of newcomers:*

QQ #107: John Collier's FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS
QQ #108: Philip MacDonald's SOMETHING TO HIDE
QQ #109: Lord Dunsany's THE LITTLE TALES OF SMETHERS
QQ #110: Edmund Crispin's BEWARE OF THE TRAINS
QQ #111: Roald Dahl's SOMEONE LIKE YOU
QQ #112: Michael Innes's DEAD MAN'S SHOES

The future of the detective-crime short story is bright indeed. We have unlimited confidence in the next six years of this decade — in the continuing renaissance of the short story of sleuthing and suspense.

TOM, DICK, AND HARRY

by MICHAEL INNES

"OLD JOSIAH HOPCUTT," SAID INspector Appleby, "was a prosperous manufacturer. And he continued prosperous even after he had ceased to manufacture anything except large-scale tedium for the people looking after him. He lived on into old age — that is to say, in a semi-

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embalmed state in an enormous villa in Harrogate."

"Was he Hopcutt's Hosiery?" I asked.

"He was. His whole career might be described as a sort of mission. He persuaded the women of England that they had legs, and a moral duty to display them. Not that Hopcutt wasn't rather a stuffy old boy himself. Very strict views on property, and so forth. And his only known exercise of the sense of humor — if it can be called that — was in the names he gave his three sons. He had them christened Tom, Dick, and Harry."

"They were triplets?"

"Not a bit of it. He just seemed to know that his excellent wife was going to bear him three sons, and went ahead on that basis. There were no daughters, by the way. Mrs. Hopcutt died giving birth to Harry, and of course there were no more children. And the boys, I think, grew up not caring for their father very much."

Appleby paused for a moment, and I asked one of those questions calculated to help him along. "And the hosiery business? Did Tom, Dick, and Harry take to that?"

"Decidedly not. Getting the glamor into wool and lisle and silk and nylon didn't appeal to any of them. If Tom had any interest in legs, it wasn't in what could be done for them at fourteen-and-eleven the pair. He married a chorus girl, was divorced, and then took himself off to Canada."

"In disgrace with his father?"

"In no more than mild disgrace, let's say. The old chap, although strict, was not fanatical. Tom was really called away by a lust for adventure, and in one way and another he contrived to lead an uncommonly dangerous life. He made one trip home, and it revealed him as having turned into a handsome, bearded, frontier-forwarding type. Then off he went again."

"And Dick, the middle son?"

"Dick too was enterprising in his way — although his history is a sad one. He lost his sight in a Commando raid. That was rather bad, because he had wanted to be a painter. However, he hitched onto a group of scientists engaged in acoustic research, and developed to an extraordinary degree of sensitiveness what was already a fine ear. Moreover, he was intelligent, so he quickly got hold of what this branch of science was about, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he might make important contributions to it. He lived in almost complete retirement, devoted to his work."

"Which leaves us," I said, "with the youngest son, Harry."

"You're quite right." Appleby gave what I sometimes feel is a rather unnecessary smile. "So it does. . . . Harry was some sort of unsuccessful broker, and his way of life was, for the most part, as prosaic as his father's had been. Nevertheless, he had a streak of his brothers' enterprise and adventurousness, and it came out in a hobby to which he was passionately devoted. Harry was a speleologist."

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"Caves?"

"Caves and underground rivers and so on. It's quite a widespread activity nowadays, and Harry belonged to several clubs and societies concerned with that sort of exploration. But he was also a bit of a lone wolf, and would go off from time to time and do a bit all on his own. One would be inclined to say that nothing more dangerous could be conceived.

"I haven't mentioned that Harry was unmarried. He lived by himself, looked after only by an elderly housekeeper, and he was quite free to develop this subterranean obsession as he pleased. Eventually it got so that he was off on it every other weekend. Well, he was just packing up for one of these occasions when the housekeeper brought him a telegram. He opened it and gave an exclamation of annoyance. 'The Savage,' he said. 'Arrived at Southampton. What a confounded nuisance!'

"The housekeeper, who hadn't been with Harry very long, didn't make much of this. 'My brother Tom,' he explained, 'back in this country and proposing to visit me. He must look after himself for a few days elsewhere. When he calls, say I may possibly be back on Monday.' And Harry finished packing and went off, having scribbled down an address in Yorkshire that would find him."

"Did he always leave an address?"

"Apparently he did — although sometimes he would wander on and become untraceable. There was certainly nothing out of the way in his going off as he did. And what he had said prepared his housekeeper for the bearded figure that turned up only a few hours later. The woman explained that her employer was away but would probably be back in three or four days. The Savage didn't seem too pleased, but he cleared out at once, simply saying that he would call his brother up on the telephone."

Appleby paused as if to consider how to tell the rest of his story. "Well, Harry turned up in Yorkshire, and spent a couple of days with a group of enthusiasts who were old acquaintances of his. Then he moved on, with only a vague reference to his perhaps having a look at the Grendale Cleft."

"What was that?"

"Some means of getting down to a system of underground caves in Cumberland. After that, Harry Hopcutt simply vanished and eventually the police were called in."

"Yourself?"

Appleby shook his head. "A young fellow called Howley. It seems that for quite a time Harry's housekeeper took no alarm, since she was accustomed to these disappearances and silences. It was the Savage who eventually kicked up a fuss. He had rung up several times with inquiries. When nearly three weeks had elapsed, he presented himself at Scotland Yard and demanded action. Nobody could say he was making an unnecessary fuss. A hunt for Harry was instituted all over the country. What was eventually found was some clothes, a rucksack, and a frayed rope."

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"At the Grendale Cleft?"

"No — but at a similar spot, much more remote and dangerous, called the Gimlet. The discovery meant that Harry had vanished forever. Alph, the sacred river itself, was not less likely to give up its dead than were the waters beneath that ghastly shaft.

"What followed was commonplace enough. Family solicitors took charge, and the Savage — Tom — moved into Harry's flat in order to straighten things up. It was there that this young Detective Sergeant of ours, Brian Howley, made a final call on him. The Savage had offered a reward for any information leading to the discovery of his brother, and it was simply Howley's duty to explain that the police had done the whole job and there was nobody to make a claim. This took him five minutes — and would have taken him only four, had there not been a very brief interruption while the Savage took a telephone call. 'Yes,' he had said into the instrument, 'Tom Hopcutt speaking.' He repeated this, waited, and then put down the receiver. 'Odd,' he had said to Howley in his Canadian accent. 'A long-distance call — but the fellow rang off.' "

Appleby paused. "Howley thought nothing of it. But, within a matter of hours, the Bearded Savage was in jail."

I was startled. "He had killed Harry?"

"My dear fellow, he *was* Harry. Surely that's clear enough?"

I shook my head in puzzlement.

"You can't do much in a false beard," Appleby explained, "except briefly and as a *tour de force*. Well, it was with a false beard that Harry presented himself to his own housekeeper, after having sent himself the telegram. Then he went off to Yorkshire, showing himself among his friends in his proper identity. After that he went into seclusion and grew the real beard — making those occasional telephone inquiries to the housekeeper, and meanwhile faking matters at the Gimlet. Once the beard was fully grown, he was ready to make his permanent appearance in Tom's shoes."

"But why? What was his purpose?"

"He had discovered that Tom had died in Canada — and in circumstances so obscure that nothing would ever be heard of it. By becoming Tom himself, he bypassed Dick as his father's heir. Remember the father's strict views on property — *only the oldest son would inherit*, you see. Or so he planned, if he hadn't been found out."

"But, my dear Appleby, how *was* he found out?"

"Dick's ear. Harry was reckoning on Dick's blindness — but he hadn't thought of his ear. It was Dick on the telephone, and Dick knew that it was Harry who had answered it, not Tom, despite the assumed Canadian accent. Of course the moment we started investigating on the right line, the bogus Savage was done for."

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Vincent Starrett . . . novelist, short-story writer, poet, essayist, critic, bibliographer, columnist, noted book collector, Sherlockophile (a founder of the Baker Street Irregulars), and one of the most distinguished "book-men" of our time who writes with charm and authority on all matters bibliophilic . . . author of (to select at random) THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, PENNY WISE AND BOOK FOOLISH, THE UNIQUE HAMLET, *and an autobiography to which we are looking forward avidly . . . We are happy to welcome Vincent back to the pages of EQMM after much too long an absence — and with a brand-new short-short about his famous amateur criminologist, Jimmie Lavender.*

CRAZY LIKE A FOX

by VINCENT STARRETT

"IT'S HIS HANDWRITING ALL RIGHT," said Jimmie Lavender. "His wife says so, and I say so too. That makes it unanimous."

"Chief Dodd thinks it's phony, just the same," said Mack, the leg man from Homicide. "Poor imitation of the Professor's brand of humor."

"*Good* imitation," said Jimmie Lavender, "considering that he probably wasn't feeling very funny. He was *forced* to write it, of course."

"That's what we're supposed to think anyway," said big Mack.

Jimmie Lavender made himself comfortable among the pillows of his hospital bed and read the letter again. It was crazy as hell, but there was method in its madness. Its very craziness meant something.

"He's trying to tell us something between the lines," Lavender mused. "Obviously he couldn't say right out: 'I'm a prisoner at 1129 Gooseberry Street. Hurry up and save me or I'll be killed.' Some reasonably smart guys read that note before they sent it to Mrs. Buckner. It had to pass their eyes. We've got to be smarter than they were to get what he's saying." Jimmie thumped his head back on the pillows and swore. "And me laid up with an appendectomy! Can you beat it?"

Mack was sympathetic. "Dodd thought you would understand it if anybody could," he soothed. "You knew Professor Buckner pretty well, didn't you?"

"I knew him well enough to be sure he didn't write that piece of nonsense just to kid us. He probably knew you'd bring it to *me*." The celebrated amateur (retired) swept a lock of hair

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out of his eyes. "Read it aloud, Mack," he said. "Maybe I'll catch something that way."

The police detective's grin became a leer. " 'Darling,' " he began with exaggerated emotion. " 'Darling, this is just to let you know I'm all right — so far. But I don't know what will happen if you don't follow my instructions exactly. I must ask you not to take this letter to the police or you will never see me again. They mean it, too. What you have to do is get a long blue envelope out of my files — you will know where to look — and send it airmail to the address I will give you. Don't be afraid. As your Aunt Bessie used to say: 'Columbus took a chance and I will, too.' I mention your Aunt Bessie and her famous remark so you will know this letter is really from me. I want you to take a chance, too, darling, and send the blue envelope quickly. It's my only hope. As soon as possible after it is received I will be released.'

"That's all," finished Mack," except the address, which is in Mexico. Do you suppose they're really going to take him to Mexico?"

"Not a chance," said Jimmie Lavender. "They'll kill him as soon as they get word the airmail letter has been received. But of course it isn't going to be received. The blue envelope probably contains a key to plans already stolen. They didn't realize that a key would be necessary. They kidnaped the Professor to find out what was wrong and he had to tell them about the key. That part's clear enough. The message for *us* is in the lines about Aunt Bessie and her allusion to Columbus. He knew he was taking a chance when he wrote those words, as he practically tells us. I think they tie in with the line ahead . . . 'to the address I will give you.' That cuts two ways."

"Mrs. Buckner thinks they've driven him crazy," said Mack. "She was so scared she almost didn't bring us the letter. But she couldn't find the blue envelope and didn't know what else to do."

"Maybe there wasn't any blue envelope," said Lavender slowly. He was thinking hard. A nurse was hovering at the door waiting for Mack to leave. She shook an impatient finger at them before she moved on. "Yes, maybe there wasn't any blue envelope. That was just a 'line' he gave them so they'd let him write the letter. He's taking chances all right! It all ties in, doesn't it, with Mrs. Buckner never having an Aunt Bessie?"

"She never had *any* aunt who made that crack about Columbus. That's why she thinks the Professor has gone crazy."

"Crazy like a fox," said Jimmie Lavender. He sat up in bed suddenly, wincing a little as his wound stabbed him. "I wonder," he murmured. "Maybe I'm crazy, too, Mack, but — what's another name for Bessie?"

"Betty, Betsy, Elizabeth, Lizzie —"

"*Elizabeth*," said Lavender softly. "That's not just a girl's name. It's a street, too. There's an Elizabeth

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Street on the southwest side — away out — and in a foreign neighborhood, too. That's the clue, Mack, as sure as you're a foot high!"

The police detective shrugged. "Pretty far-fetched, ain't it?"

"Sure it's far-fetched. It had to pass the eyes of whoever read that letter before it was sent. But it's simple, too. They might have got it. The Professor was taking his life in his hands and he knew it. He was as careful as he could be; but he *had* to tell us where he was."

"Okay," agreed Mack, grinning. "It could be, and it's easy enough tested. There's a lot of houses on this Elizabeth Street. Now, if he told us the street name maybe he told us the number, too."

"He *did* tell us," snapped Jimmie Lavender. "Wrote it out under their eyes. There are two false notes in that letter, Aunt Bessie and —"

"Columbus! Well, well whaddaya know!" The hulking detective began to count rapidly on his fingers. "Not enough letters really — only eight. Could be, though. How about the whole name? *Christopher Colum* —" Again he counted on his fingers. "Nineteen, I make it."

Lavender looked puzzled. "Well, yes, I didn't think of that. And perhaps one number's as good as another. Little too easy, though. Those fellows can count, too."

Mack frowned. "What else could it be?"

Jimmie Lavender tried to stretch his arm, felt an abdominal twinge, and said, "Hand me those cigarettes from the table, will you, Mack?" He lit up, smiling happily. "Look, Mack! What date do you associate with the name Columbus?"

"Oh, oh!" said Mack. Then suddenly, in a low voice, glancing nervously at the door, he began to sing. . . ." 'In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.' That's *it*, Mr. Lavender!"

"It could be," agreed Lavender. "It's worth a try anyway. We've got to do *something* for the Professor. Get back to headquarters fast and raid 1492 Elizabeth Street. Tell Dodd to take a big squad."

He lay back on the pillows, then sat up again. "And call me up, Mack, as soon as you can. My God, wouldn't I be tied to this damn' bed with all this breaking!"

For a long time he lay quietly, thinking and waiting, while the business of the hospital went on around him. Then the telephone at his bedside rang its muffled note.

It was Dodd, the chief of detectives, and for a moment he thought the chief was tight. Then he realized that he was singing in a deep bass rumble that sounded like an elevated train pulling into the station at Madison and Wabash. He caught some of the words.

" '. . . *and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. In fourteen hundred and* . . .' "

He assumed that all was now well with Professor Buckner and the blue envelope, if any.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FRANK GRUBER**

TITLE: ***You Can't Crack a Modern Safe***

TYPE: Crime Story — **Black Mask** school

CHARACTERS: Tom McLowery and the Harvey Morgan gang

LOCALE: Chicago, Illinois

COMMENTS: *A fast action story about a professional safe-cracker who got unprofessionally involved in a bank holdup . . .*

EDDIE'S GAME WAS MUCH BETTER than usual. I had to strike out to beat him. We were playing for five dollars. I picked up the old sixteen-pound ball and put everything I had into the shot. The ball sizzled down the alley and I held my breath, until I saw that it was going to hit the Number One pin a bit to the right. Then I turned and grinned at Eddie.

I heard the pins crashing down the alley and Eddie said, "You lucky stiff!"

"Lucky nothing," I gave him back. "Scientific playing, that's what."

"Yah," jeered Eddie. "Let's see you knock 'em down twice more."

My ball was coming down the slot and I caught it. It was then I saw these two fellows talking to Nick. Nick didn't look very happy. In his business, you know, a guy hates to point out his regulars to strangers. They might be bill collectors, process servers — or dicks.

The big guy looked like a sure-enough dick. He was built like a wrestler, only bigger. The other guy was blond; tall and good-looking.

I saw Nick nodding in my direction and I wondered what the hell I had done. Well, no, I didn't really wonder what I'd done. I knew. But I wondered how they'd found out. The twenty had been on the floor under the desk. Any of the Kreeger employees could have picked it up.

I rolled the two-finger ball down the alley again and I got — a railroad. A pin stayed up on each side.

"Pay me!" yelps Eddie, gleefully.

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I had to scrape up the change from my jeans. There wasn't enough left to pay Nick for the lines. If the Greek hadn't pointed me out to those two mugs I wouldn't have got nervous and missed that last shot. Well, just for that I'd stand him off for the lines. And maybe I'd forget about it.

"Wanna play another?" Eddie asks.

The two guys are coming over to me. "Nah," I told Eddie. "You're too lucky tonight."

The big guy pokes a fat finger in my ribs. "Your name McLowery?"

"You know it is," I give him. "The Greek told you, didn't he?"

"Umm," he says.

"Easy, kid," says the blond. "We ain't cops. We read about you in the papers and we thought we'd take a look at you. I'm a businessman, I am, and I thought maybe I could throw something your way. Interested?"

Interested? In what? In a pinch the blond could have been a businessman. But the gorilla — the only business he could ever have been in was busting skulls. But they'd read about me in the papers, huh? Well, I was flat. My last five bucks had gone to Eddie. It was two days to payday. And my pay envelopes usually lasted about four days. Sixty bucks a week is only chicken feed to a guy who likes good times.

I led the way from the bowling alley into the saloon in the other room. The blond takes the hint and orders a round of beers. "Shoot," I tell him.

He hauls a newspaper out of his side coat-pocket. "It says here that you're the mechanic for the Dibble Safe and Lock Company. Right?"

I shrug. "So what?"

"So your outfit has installed safes in the Kreeger Grocery Stores, and in the flood down-state last week they lose the combination of a safe. Catch on?"

I do. "You mean that malarkey about me being sent down there to crack the safe for them and I open it up in about two minutes?"

The blond scowls at me. "Malarkey, huh? You didn't open the box then?"

"Yeah, sure, I opened it. So what? I've opened lots of boxes. That's my job."

The blond looks me in the eye, then looks down at his hands. "Tommy," he says, "you look like a right guy to me. I'm going to tell you who I am. My name's Morgan, Harvey Morgan. And this tub here is usually called Bill the Bull. Those names mean anything to you?"

They mean plenty. Only about five thousand cops would like to lay hands on Harvey Morgan and Bill the Bull. But I'm not a cop. I'm a safe mechanic and I make sixty bucks per week.

I give Morgan a nod. "I'm glad to know you, Mr. Morgan."

"H'arya," he says. He reaches into his pants pocket and brings out a roll of green stuff big enough to choke Bill the Bull. "You roll a nice game, Tommy," he tells me. "Only you had bad luck. G'wan back and give the guy a trimming." He skims off two twenties and hands them to me.

I look at the double sawbucks. "What do I do for this?"

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"Nothing," Morgan gives me. "Nothin' at all. Go on and bowl a few lines. I'll see you around maybe sometime."

He jerks his head at the Bull and the two of them walk out of the saloon. Of course I'm no chump. Harvey Morgan's interested in me because I'm a safe mechanic. He stakes me to forty bucks, not because he likes my looks but because he figures on using me in something or other. Sometime. Not now though.

I go back to the bowling alley and take Eddie on again. He's still carrying his horseshoe and he takes me for twenty-five bucks before the Greek chases us out so he can close the joint.

I win a few bucks the next night and the day after it's payday. For the other working guys who hang around the alleys, too. So naturally we have some good games. My jinx is still riding me and I lose the roll, even my room rent.

My landlady's peeved about that. I forgot to pay her the week before too. So on Sunday night when Harvey Morgan and Bill the Bull come into the bowling alley I'm glad to see them.

"Hi, Tommy," Morgan greets me. "What you doin'?"

"Nothing," I tell him. "I'm broke tonight."

"Zat so? Well, how about coming over to my place a while? Some fellas I'd like you to meet."

I figure I can't lose anything and I might gain something. Maybe a couple more bills. So I go with Morgan and the Bull. They've got a little apartment over on Lincoln Park West. Just a small place, but classy. There's a couple fellows there who Harvey introduces as Deke Bradley and Louie Marino.

"Tommy's the lad who cracked that Kreeger can," Harvey tells the boys.

"The Jimmy Valentine guy, huh?" says Deke Bradley, a skinny guy who could have passed for a minister if he'd had his collar turned backward.

"How do you do it, kid?" asks Louie Marino, who looks like he might be the triggerman of the mob. "D'you rub your fingers on sandpaper to make 'em sensitive?"

I laugh at him. "What you been reading, fella? You can't open a safe like that. Not a Dibble safe, anyway."

Harvey Morgan grins pleasantly. "See, fellas, I told you it wasn't that easy. . . . Well, how do you do it, Tommy? You use one of those stetho-things the doctors use? To listen to the tumblers?"

"Uh-uh," I tell him. "You fellas have the wrong ideas about safes. There ain't a man in the world can open a safe these days by sandpapering his fingers or using something to hear the tumblers. Safes ain't made that way. Not no more."

"Then how the hell'd you open the box?" snorts Bill the Bull. "The paper didn't say nothin' about you using soup."

"You can blow a Dibble safe with soup," I tell them, "but you'd have to use so much it'd blow the safe and the whole building to bits. Dibble

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safes can't be cracked, except with one thing — an acetylene torch."

"Nuts," says Deke Bradley. "I knew a pete man eight-ten years ago. He cracked lots of safes. With soup. And some of them he knocked off the combinations, then poked out the rod around the tumblers."

"Where?" I ask. "Out in Broken Lance, Wyoming, or Red Horse, Saskatchewan? I hear there's a few old tin boxes out there you can do those things to. But there ain't none around this country. Leastwise none in which anyone keeps over four dollars and thirty-five cents. I tell you, you can't crack a modern safe like the Dibble. You start knocking off the combination dial on one and what happens — you move the dial one-eighth of an inch from the door and it automatically drops a bar inside which locks the door tighter than ever. And try drilling a Dibble safe. You'll bust your drills. There ain't none made hard enough to drill through the kind of carbon steel we use in our boxes. Like I told you — they're nitro-proof. A torch is the only thing and you know what you need with a torch for a two-hour cutting job. Eight-ten tanks of gas. A truck to haul them there. And chances are the box you start cutting is wired with an amplifier inside which takes the sound down to the Protective Service and brings a dozen cops in two minutes. So what?"

"So how did *you* open that Kreeger box with your bare hands?" snarls Louie Marino.

"Yeah," said Harvey Morgan. "The paper said you didn't know the combination."

I put my tongue in my cheek. "You really want to know that?"

"No," Morgan snaps. "I asked you up here because we needed a fourth at bridge. That's why I slipped you the bills the other night, too. C'mon, give!"

I read the papers and I know what sort of guys Morgan and his playmates are. I know what's in the back of their heads, too. But I know what my landlady said would happen if I didn't come around with the two weeks' room rent that night.

So I take a chance. "That little bit of inside info will cost you one hundred bucks, Morgan."

Bill the Bull takes a step toward me. "Why, you little squirt!"

He looks like he'll sock me.

"Cut it, Bull!" says Morgan. He fetches out his roll and counts off a hundred. "Talk now, Tommy, and it better be worth it."

"All right. These Kreeger Stores have our Model 80's. There's a steel box on top of the safe. The store managers drop their receipts in the box every night and it falls down into the safe. The store men can't open the boxes — they don't know the combinations. Only the collector knows that. So every morning he goes around to the Kreeger Stores with the armored car. He opens the safes and takes out the dough."

"We know that," cuts in Deke Bradley. "There's two guys with him. And they've got tommyguns."

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I nod. "I ride with them. That's how come I opened that safe. I watch Sullivan open the boxes in Stores 1, 2, 3. The combination of Store 1 is 10-15-20. Store 2 it's 20-25-30; Store Number Three, 30-35-40. Catch on? Sullivan sets these combinations himself. Without even knowing he does it himself he goes down the line, using 10 for the first, 20 for the second and 30 for the third. He's lost the combination for the fourth store. I start with 40-45-50. It opens the box. That's all there's to it."

"I'll be damned!" exclaims Deke and Louie both. Harvey Morgan don't say nothing but I'm watching his eyes and I see them light up. So I throw some cold water on him. "Sorry, Harvey, but after I open the box I tell Sullivan what he's done. And he's gone and changed all the combinations. I don't know what they are now — but I'll lay ten to one they don't work in rotation like that any more."

"That's too bad," Morgan says. "Well, Tommy, your info wasn't worth a cent to us — but keep the dough. Tell me some more about safes. It's interesting. For instance, how's a bank like the Drovers equipped —"

"Hey!" yelps Deke.

" 'S'all right, Deke," says Harvey. "Tommy's a right guy. He's proved it, ain't he?" He half turns his head away and winks at Deke, figuring I won't see it.

Well, I can see how things stack up. Morgan's brought me up to his hideout. He's shelled out money to me and he's tipped a plan. I know he ain't stupid enough to let me walk to the cops with all that.

I give him the straight of it. "Old Mollinson of the Drovers is one of our best customers. He's gone the limit on protection. He's got the best Dibble vault there is. It's wired, so you can forget about cutting it with a torch."

"I wasn't figuring on a torch job," says Morgan. He sticks out his index finger and makes a cocking motion with his thumb.

"Maybe you got something there," I concede. "Hear they keep quite a few bills there. Especially on Mondays."

"We know that," says Deke. "We've cased the joint. The packing company pays off on Monday morning. Checks. So the help rushes over to the bank at noon to cash the checks."

"Tomorrow," says Harvey Morgan, "they won't cash no checks — on account of we're calling at the bank at about 11:55."

I shake my head. "You do that — and you'll get about two hundred bucks. 'Cause why? 'Cause they got five cages in that bank. At eleven thirty they bring out the dough from the vault they figure they'll need at noon. They split it five ways — one-fifth for each cage. But you know what they got in each of those five cages? Yeah, a Model 80. When the teller gets the dough from the vault he tosses it into his 80, sets the clock

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to open at around 12:05 or 12:10. So you get there at 11:55 and you'll get the chicken feed."

"Ah," says Harvey Morgan. "The time to knock them off then is 11:31 — right after the vault's been opened but before they put the money into the five little boxes. Tommy, my lad, that's going to get you a grand."

"I could use it." I look around at the boys. "Well, I'll be seeing you then."

"You going some place?" asks Louie Marino.

"Take it easy," says Harvey Morgan. "You know how it is, Tommy. We trust you — but we can't take no chances. Stick around — until noon tomorrow."

"What about my job? I work on Mondays."

"You can take a day off."

"The same day a job's pulled on one of our own customers? Some dick might get nosey and find out things. There's always a lot of excitement at our shop after a job. We get reports, you know."

Harvey figures for a minute; then, "Look, Tommy, I got a pal up in Eagle Lake, Wisconsin. It's two hundred miles from here. I'll have Louie run up with a letter from you. He'll give it to my pal, who'll mail it tomorrow afternoon. Get the postmark on it. Mail it to some friend of your'n. You can say you're up there fishing or something. For a grand you can do that. They won't fire you for takin' off a couple of days. You're a good man."

It sounds good. So I write a note and address it to Sam Sedlar, who works at the shop with me. Harvey takes Louie into the bedroom, talks to him a while, then Louie leaves the flat. The rest of us sit down to a nickel ante game and I lose twelve bucks. Harvey won't let us play for bigger stakes. Says it makes hard feelings among the boys for one of them to lose too much.

We hit the hay around midnight and are up at 7, Deke cooks some breakfast and at 8 o'clock the bunch of us are ready.

"How come so early?" I ask. "The job don't get pulled until eleven thirty."

"You'll see," says Morgan.

Deke goes off to a garage and comes back with a sedan. It ain't a new car but the motor runs like it's greased with soft butter. Bull and Deke sit in front, and me and Harvey in back. We roll down Ogden Avenue to North, then head west. Deke takes it easy. He don't go over 30 miles all the way out to the west side.

The Drovers Bank is a couple blocks in Cicero on North. It's a nice street from there on west. Deke parks the car a little way from the front of the bank, kills the engine, and turns around. "Okay, Harve."

Harvey Morgan pulls out a stop watch. He says, "Ready" and pushes in the stem of the watch. Deke steps on the gas and the car leaps away from the curb. Deke pushes it — but not over forty. Not until Austin. There's a traffic light there and Harvey times

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that. On the other side of Austin, Deke lets out the car and we make sixty-five inside of a block. We zoom along a mile, then Deke pulls the car to the side of the road, behind a black sedan that's parked there. We wait for fifteen seconds, then Harve says "Oke" and we're off again. Deke turns right at the crossroads, runs to Belmont — two miles in under two minutes. Then left — to a cemetery. We turn into that, stop for a few seconds, then go on again. Back to North Avenue, and after a couple of detours, to the bank.

"Nice going," I compliment Harvey Morgan.

He's pleased. "Yeah, sure. We been at this over a year and ain't had no slip-ups yet. That's longer'n Dillinger lasted. I figure we can do it another year. Then I'm going to Australia and raise sheep."

It's around 9:30 now. Deke drives us to a poolroom over on Kedzie near Fullerton and we go inside and play a few sticks of pool. Deke and the Bull are pretty nervous and don't do so well.

At 11 o'clock Louie Marino shows up. I've been wondering about him. None of the others had mentioned him. From Harvey's actions though I'd figured he'd know his stuff.

"You mail Tommy's letter, Louie?" asks Harvey, giving the triggerman the wink.

Louie grins, "Yeah, sure. The kid's in the clear. He can prove he's been at Eagle Lake, Wisconsin, until 5 o'clock this afternoon. How's things here?"

Harvey nods his head.

"Fine. I guess we'll start out."

We go out and climb into our car. Deke drives around the west side for fifteen–twenty minutes but I notice he's gradually working over toward North Avenue. He's good at timing things. It's 11:29 when he parks the car about a hundred feet from the bank. Louie gets out first and walks up the street. Then Bill and Harvey step out. "You stay here with Deke," Harvey tells me. "Keep him company."

Well, I hadn't been very keen on going into the bank, anyway. In fact, about this time there's nothing I'm wishing more than that I was down at the Dibble shop paying attention to my work. Sixty bucks a week, each and every payday, ain't nothing to sneeze at for a guy like me, who's single. After all, I don't have to bowl or play poker. There's other ways of having fun — not so expensive. I figure maybe I'll look into them.

Deke's shut off the motor, but he's got the switch on and all he's got to do is step on the starter when the boys come out. He's paying plenty of attention to me, kind of leaning back against the door on his side, his fingers carelessly inside his coat. And grinning.

The clock on the dashboard says 11:31. I don't feel so good. Maybe I'll never feel so good from now on. I watch the clock. Almost 11:32.

And then the gun pops. It's not a very loud pop on account of it's inside the bank and we're a hundred

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feet from it. I probably wouldn't even have heard it if I hadn't been expecting to hear something like that. The best plans go haywire and somehow I've been feeling ever since breakfast that something is going to go haywire with this plan. It's *too* easy. For me, I mean. I've been promised a grand and I never got no dough like that in my life. Something always happens just about the time I'm reaching for the kale.

"Easy, Tommy!" Deke cautions me when I fidget around in the front seat. He shows me about an inch of the gun under his coat. I slide down in the seat.

Eleven thirty-three.

Pop!

Again! And now they're coming. On the run. And there's excitement back at the bank. Deke steps on the starter, edges the car away from the curb a few inches.

They're up by the car now. Harvey Morgan rips open the door behind me and the three of them pile in. The car's rolling before they even get the door closed.

Deke is making forty in second. He shifts into high but holds the bus down to forty-five. He's driving swell. We don't attract no attention even though we're going a bit better than the limit. We pass a cop on the sidewalk a block from the bank and he don't even look at us.

We get a break at Austin. The light's green. Then Deke opens her up. We zoom through Austin at sixty-five.

"What happened, Harve?" Deke tosses back then.

"Louie," answers Morgan. "Nervous again."

"Aw, what was I to do?" complains Louie. "That watchman would a plugged me if I hadn't cut him down."

"Yeah!" snarls Morgan. "And that teller when we was leaving, he'd probably thrown a brick after you, huh?"

We hit the crossroad where we'd stopped earlier in the morning. The black bus is still there. I'd figured it would be. Deke pulls up behind it and everybody starts piling out — everybody except me.

"Not you, kid!" says Harvey Morgan. "This is as far as you go!" He pushes me back. "Run it out in the country if you want. It's yours!"

Louie shows me his rod and I stay in. The gang pile into the black bus and turn into the crossroad. Then I jump and take out across the open lots. I can already hear the police siren back up Austin. I don't want to be anywhere around when the cops come.

It's open country here. Only a house or so to a block. I'm almost two blocks away when the cops' car stops by our first car. They can see me from where they are if they look around. But I know they ain't going to be looking for one man on foot. So I keep going.

I walk two miles south to River Forest and catch a bus downtown. I go to a movie. When I come out, three hours later, I buy a paper.

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The headlines are four inches deep:

DROVERS BANK HELD UP!

The Drovers Bank was held up today in one of the most spectacular daylight holdups ever perpetrated in this city. The bandits descended upon the west side establishment shortly before noon and with cold-blooded ferocity got away with $225,000. They left in their wake two wounded men, the watchman, Jerome Widdemer, 59, on the point of death, and Lester Gillis, 28, teller, shot in the left forearm. The bank robbers, believed to be the notorious Harvey Morgan gang, made a clean getaway. Police assert . . .

I didn't read any more. Two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars! And Harvey Morgan had promised me a grand — which I hadn't even got!

I went to another movie. When I came out the papers yelled at me:

VICTIM OF DAYLIGHT HOLDUP DIES

I'd been expecting it. I was now an accessory to murder. I knew the term. I knew about what to expect if the cops pinned me to the job. I could tell them I'd been forced to give them information that helped with the job. Yeah, I could tell them that!

The department stores had closed, but down on South State Street I picked up a second-hand suitcase. On Van Buren I found a sporting goods and hardware place open and bought some fishing tackle. I checked the stuff at the Northwestern Depot, then went down to the public library on Michigan Avenue and got out some maps and stuff on Wisconsin. I wanted to get some dope on Eagle Lake. I couldn't get much. I went back to the Northwestern and checked up on trains. I found there was one leaving Eagle Lake at 2 in the afternoon which got into Chi around nine in the evening. It was 8:30 now. I had some supper in the lunchroom in the depot, then got my stuff from the checkroom. I hung around until the crowd came out of the Eagle Lake train, then mixed in and made my way to the taxicab lineup outside. I climbed into one and had the driver take me to Bissell Street. I talked with him most of the way. I figured I might as well get him to remember me. Just in case. The ride cost me $1.15. I gave the cabby a buck and a half.

I got into the house without Mrs. Kunz seeing me. And then when I opened the door of my room on the second floor, there they was. Two of them. I tried to be surprised, made off I didn't know they was dicks.

"What's the idea? This is my room."

"Yeah?" one of the dicks says. "You're Tom McLowery?"

"So what?" I give him.

The other dick takes my suitcase and fishing stuff from me. He opens the suitcase. "One shirt, one pair of pants — dry cleaned. Fishing rod, oil on it. What's the matter? Didn't you do any fishing up at Eagle Lake?"

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"Eagle Lake!" The floor almost smacks me.

"Let's go down to headquarters," says the other dick. "We'll talk things over."

They bring the fishing stuff and the suitcase along. But they don't question me on the way downtown. In fact, they act pretty decent.

There's a gang of them down at headquarters. Murdock, the District Attorney whose picture I've seen in the papers; Cap Lenihan, the best cop in town, and eight–ten others.

The D.A.'s running the show. He begins by showing me the letter I'd written the night before, the alibi letter Louie was supposed to have taken up to Eagle Lake for Morgan's pal to mail.

"One of the men who held up the Drovers Bank this morning pulled this from his pocket," the D.A. says. "Is this your handwriting? Did you write this letter?"

I'm no chump. I'm in the safe business and I've read plenty of reports on jobs. I know the cops are as smart as most crooks — smarter. And I can see that Harvey Morgan's thrown me to the wolves. There ain't nothing I can gain by denying things except a bit of time — and there's no reason for that. The Eagle Lake alibi is out.

I go into my spiel: "I wrote the letter. Harvey Morgan made me do it. But I didn't stick up the bank. I mean, I didn't help. I was along, but they was holding a gun on me. I can explain. I work for the Dibble Lock & Safe Company."

"We know that, McLowery," said Murdock. "Your superior, Mr. Miley, will be here in a minute."

"Let's wait until he comes then," I suggest. "It'll save a lot of questions."

I hardly get the words out of my mouth then Miley comes into the room. He shakes his head when he sees me. "McLowery, to say I'm surprised about this is putting it mildly."

"Me too," I give him. "It's your fault that I'm in this. It began with that Kreeger job last week. That hokum you dished out to the papers after I opened the box in Edwardsville."

Miley raises his eyebrows. "What do you mean, Tommy? I gave out that statement to the papers for publicity purposes. To advertise Dibble Safes —"

"You did all right," I cut in. "You advertised me, too. That's how this started. Last night Harvey Morgan and Bill the Bull put the finger on me."

"What do you mean?" the D.A. cuts in. "They *kidnaped* you?"

"Yeah, sure. You don't think I was a member of their gang, do you? Until yesterday I wouldn't have known a bank robber if I'd seen one. Like I said, last night Morgan comes into the alley —"

"Alley?"

"Bowling alley. On the corner where I live. Morgan and this Bull comes in and give me the eye to follow them outside. What I mean, they got their hands in their pockets and they say enough to me to make a

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guess what kinda fellas they are."

"Exactly what did they say?" the D.A. asks.

"Well, this Morgan says he's a businessman and he's got a — a proposition for me. He asks me to come outside. Of course I guess he hasn't got any proposition for me, but his hand's in his pocket. And the big fella's too — so I go outside. They shove me into a car and drive me to this apartment on Lincoln Park West —"

"What? You know where it is?" snaps the D.A.

"Yeah, sure, they didn't blindfold me. They didn't need to."

The D.A. looks at Cap Lenihan and they step to one side of the room and whisper a while. Then they come back. "You say Morgan took you to this apartment. What then?"

"He asked me all about safes — whether I could open them without the combinations. I told him, no, no one could do that."

"No? I understood from this newspaper article that you had opened a safe without knowing the combination."

I look at Miley, the boss, and he explains about that. He's kind of red-faced while he's doing it. He ought to be. If it hadn't been for that stunt getting in the papers I wouldn't be in this now.

When Miley finishes, the D.A. gets back to me again. I tell him the straight of it — well, mostly. How Morgan wouldn't let me leave and got me to write that letter that was supposed to be mailed from Eagle Lake. I tell him about the next morning, how Deke had held a gun on me all the time Morgan and the others were in the bank, how they pushed me out of the getaway car. I don't tell him about the grand Morgan had promised me.

The D.A.'s shaking his head when I finish. He asks me some questions, stuff I'd already told him. Figuring he'd trip me up. In the middle of it a cop comes in with Old Henry Mollinson, the president of the Drovers Bank. He'd been sent for. The D.A. pulls a fast one. He gets me shoved in the crowd and then tells Mollinson one of the robbers is here in the room and to pick me out.

It was a dumb stunt. Any goof could have told I wasn't one of the cops. Miley's a guy over 200 pounds with three chins. No stick-up guy ever looked like him. It was a cinch that Mollinson would pick me out.

But he didn't. He looked me over long enough, then shook his head. "I'm sorry, I saw the three men very clearly but none of them is here."

The D.A.'s plenty disappointed about that. Not me, though. At least I wasn't proved an inside man. Well, there's some more talk, plenty of it, then after a while Cap Lenihan hustles me out of the room to a squad car, loaded with cops and artillery. "We're going out to Lincoln Park West, McLowery," he tells me. "I know Morgan won't be there — but Murdock wants me to go, so we go."

I tell them where. The cops sur-

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round the apartment building and some of us charge in, giving the night elevator-operator the scare of his life. Just to make it interesting, one of the cops tips that we're after Harvey Morgan, the bank robber, and the operator gets so scared he can't work the elevator. Anyway, we breeze up to Morgan's apartment. It's as empty as a love nest after the wife has found out about it.

Well, I spend the night in the clink. It's a lousy deal and I figure I'll be in a long time. But in the morning I get the surprise of my life. I'm called out front and guess what, I'm turned loose.

"The D.A. believes your story, McLowery," Cap Lenihan tells me. "Your boss has given you a clean bill, too. Says you've never been in trouble before." He gives me my money and things and lets me get almost to the door, then he hollers: "If you should happen to run across Morgan or one of the boys, just remember — there's ten grand reward!"

Ten G's, huh? Not bad. Harvey Morgan owes me a grand. I gave him what he wanted for it — but he reneged.

I'm a hero down at the bowling alley. The gang buys me beers and makes me tell them about Harvey Morgan and his boys — and the job. Well, the cops hadn't told me not to talk.

But the next morning I get a jolt when I report down at the Dibble offices. "Sorry, Tommy," Miley tells me, "but the big boss tells me to lay you off. For a while, anyway. He didn't like the idea of a Dibble man giving information to a bunch of stick-up artists."

I get sore and express my opinion of old Dibble. And Miley, too. "You fat slob, it was your big mouth that got me into that jam. It's you that oughta be canned, not me. What would you have done if Harvey Morgan had stuck a rod into your fat stomach?"

Miley gets sore and we have words. When I leave I know I'm canned for keeps. And now I am up against it. I've paid Mrs. Kunz her room rent. I've lost a few bucks bowling and I'm down to less than fifty bucks. I know how things are. With the stuff the papers have printed about me I'll have a sweet time landing another job. Yeah, sure, the D.A. turned me loose. Lack of evidence. But the papers had evidence enough. Hell, half the guys at the bowling alley, who really knew me, figure I was in with the Morgan mob.

For a lousy hundred and forty bucks. If I'd got the grand Morgan had promised me I wouldn't minded losing the job. I think about it quite a while and the more I think the sorer I get.

I ride a street car out to West North Avenue. There're two new uniformed watchmen outside the Drovers Bank now; probably two-three inside. Watching the barn door after the horse has been stolen. I walk past the bank three-four times. Then I park

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myself on the corner in front of a drug store. I read the *News* from first page to last, smoke a half pack of cigarettes, and get two shoeshines. All the while I'm watching people. Even when I get my lunch inside the drug store I keep an eye on the window.

It's about two in the afternoon when I see Bill the Bull. He's on the other side of the street, as big as ever. I follow him on my side of the street to a grocery store, then back again. He leaves North Avenue and walks south. There ain't many people on the street, so I hold back. He goes two blocks, then turns east. I hurry to catch up. And I'm so dumb about it I walk right into the Bull's mitts. He's hiding behind the edge of the building. He'd spotted me all along and has been leading me on.

"Hello, Tommy," he grins.

"Hello, Bill," I say, kind of weak. "How's Harvey — and the boys?"

"They're dying to see you, Tommy. Come on, let's go visit them."

Believe it or not, he leads me back to North Avenue and into a walkup — right across the street from the Drovers Bank! They've got a flat on the second floor and they've been watching from the window. They saw me hanging around across the street. Bill the Bull goes out the back way, comes around and lets me pick him up.

The boys ain't so glad to see me. "What's the idea?" Harvey Morgan grouches at me. "How'd you tumble we'd be around here?"

"That test ride day before yesterday," I answer him. "I figured there wasn't any reason for the Deke to come back here *after* the job — unless you was figuring on hiding out around here."

"A smart guy!" cracks Louie Marino from where he's peeking out the window. "You shoulda let me do what I wanted to do."

"I got pinched," I say. "I lost my job on account of it. You didn't give me that grand you promised. And I'm almost broke."

Harvey Morgan swears. "For a lousy grand you take a chance on leading the cops here — or have you already squealed to them?"

"Uh-uh. I didn't tell them nothing." I try to sound convincing.

"Maybe not," says Deke Bradley from the window. "But I don't like the looks of things outside."

"What?" Harvey Morgan hops to the window. He gets down on his knees and peeks out the bottom of the window shade that's pulled down to within an inch of the sill.

He looks out a while. "The two guys waiting for the bus?" he asks Deke. "How long they been there?"

"Ever since Bull came in. And those guys with the peddler's wagon full of oranges, they pulled up the same time and they ain't *trying* to sell no oranges."

Harvey gets up and comes over to me. He grins nastily, and without saying anything biffs me one on the jaw. I go back on my heels. Bill the Bull growls with pleasure then, steps in,

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and he mauls me for a couple of minutes. When he quits I'm in a corner, not caring much about anything. It's a couple of minutes before I begin taking any interest again. Then I hear Harvey in conference with the boys.

"We can make a rush for it," he tells them, "but the chances are against us."

"They got a murder rap on us," says Bill the Bull. "What's the use of stalling? Either we bust out — or get it in a few weeks."

"I guess," says Morgan, "this is the time to play our ace in the hole. I mean — the certain party. He's got to come through for us or we blow off the lid."

"Yeah, sure," howl Louie and Bill the Bull. "He can't let us be nabbed. We'll tell what's what."

Harvey Morgan steps to a telephone and dials. A minute later he says: "This is Harvey Morgan talking. . . . Nuts to that! My life's at stake. You got to do something. I'm *telling* you. You tried to doublecross us. That makes it even. But I'm warning you — you get us out of this or I'll blow off, and where'll you be then? . . . That's better. What? Hurry it up. We're right across the street."

I'm watching Harvey and I can see his face light up. He nods a couple of times, then says, "I'll give you five."

He hangs up. "Watch the window, Deke. He's going to call in the cops. Tell them he just got an anonymous call that we're hiding out two blocks away. Watch it. When the cops go in the bank, we blow."

The whole gang of them go to the windows. In a minute Louie yelps. "There he is. He's talking to the peddlers."

"And one of 'em's gone to get the others!" adds Deke.

"We'll give them three minutes to get any cops that might be in back," says Harvey Morgan.

He steps away from the window and sees me. He scowls. "What we goin' to do with this punk?"

Louie Marino pulls out his fixer and grins. "I'll take care of him."

Well, I don't feel so good about that. But Harvey Morgan holds Louie off. "No, better not shoot here. We'll take him along. We might be able to use him."

For target practice probably. Far as I know that's the only good I'd be to them from now on.

Deke gets up from the window. "All right, Harvey, now's the time. They're in the bank."

Harvey opens the closet door and hauls out a small suitcase. Yeah, they been lugging the boodle around just like that. At that, I guess they didn't figure there'd be any use stashing it anywhere. If they got it — the money wouldn't be any use to them.

So they push me out of the flat. It's an old building, up over a store. Morgan seems to have rented the whole floor. Probably did it weeks ago and had one of the boys use it now and then to get folks used to it. We go down a back stairs into a small yard behind the store, then head for an alley.

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There's a high board fence by the alley. Harvey pushes it open and shoves me through.

Me, I act quick. I throw myself to one side and to the pavement. The bullets go over my head.

Yeah, the alley's full of cops. And what I mean, lead certainly flies for a minute. Harvey, who was just behind me, got the first load full blast. He ain't even in the fighting. Deke and Louie and Bill the Bull shoot a while, but they've been caught by surprise. And anyway, there's too many cops.

It takes maybe fifteen seconds. I get a scratch on the calf, but that's all. What Morgan and his gang got though is several pounds of lead. I lay still for a minute or two until I'm sure the cops ain't so nervous any more, then I groan and sit up.

Cap Lenihan sees me. "Ah, Tommy McLowery," he says. "Your luck's still holding!"

"It may be luck," I give him, "but it's all bad. I can explain this."

"I'll bet you can," says the cap. "You might even be able to convince a jury, but it might be a mite hard when they hear how you headed for Morgan's hideout the minute we turned you loose. But then — you can't tell about juries."

"If I hadn't headed for here, you'd never have got Morgan," I tell the captain. "You tailed me. I knew darn well you would. Well I remembered something this morning. Look, Captain, I'll show you something interesting. Open that suitcase and count what's in it."

He looks at me funny-like, but does what I say. Right on the alley pavement. It takes him about three minutes. "Seventy-eight thousand, I make it," he says then. "Harvey stashed most of it, somewhere."

"Uh-uh," I say. "Harvey seems to be dead and I doubt whether he'd talk even if he wasn't. But listen!"

I talk to the captain for a couple of minutes. He shakes his head when I finish. "The thing's screwy — but I'll try anything once. Let's go."

He signals to a couple of the cops to follow us and we go around the alley and out to North Avenue. There's a thousand people around, but we don't pay any attention to them. We go into the bank, right through to Henry Mollinson's private office.

He's plenty excited when he sees the captain. "Did you — did you get them?" he chatters.

The captain nods. "Harvey Morgan and this kid surrendered and we shot it out with the others."

The bank president goggles at me. "Why — why this is the man who works for the safe company, isn't it?"

"Yep, we turned him loose and he went straight to the gang's hideout. He tells an interesting story. Harvey verified some of it, but the G-men grabbed him off for private questioning. Look, Mollinson — you know what Morgan and McLowery here say?"

Henry Mollinson chokes. Then he claps a hand to his forehead and yelps. "Just a minute, Captain. I — I feel a

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bit faint. I'll be right back. Just want to get a glass of water."

One of the cops starts to block Mollinson's charge to a certain door, but Cap Lenihan shakes his head. Mollinson slams the door on himself and the gun goes off right away.

The cops rush to the private door and Cap Lenihan lets out a "whoo." Then he says, "So it's true, after all. Mollinson had been tapping the till. He arranged for Morgan to hold up the bank, so he could cover up his own embezzlement."

"Yeah," I tell him, "but Morgan pulled a doublecross. I figure he was supposed to stick up the bank in the afternoon — after the packing house folks had got their money. There'd probably been ten-fifteen thousand around then. And Mollinson would holler about two hundred and twenty-five thousand. Morgan came early though and got seventy-eight."

"Thanks to you, me lad," says Cap Lenihan. "Well, I'm willing to overlook it. I'll give you a break — you've made up for your part and I figure you'll go straight from now on. But that reward money — I think it ought to be split between the family of the watchman and the teller. Well, maybe you can have a grand of it. That oke by you?"

"I don't want any of it," I tell the cap. "You see, the Dibble folks can hardly refuse to give me back my job — if you put in a word for me."

Cap Lenihan nods. "Yeah, I guess I will. A good word, too!"

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NO NICKEL AND DIME STUFF

by WILLARD MARSH

THE BARE BULB THREW A HARSH, flat light over the dining room, putting a glare on the eroded woodwork, shadowing the worn walls. Steve Karkos sat at the head of the table, his massive hands jabbing with a sullen intentness at his plate. He was still in his work clothes, his features grimed and irritable with fatigue. The little girls, Mary and Angela, sat between their father and their mother. The girls were two years apart but they looked like twins in their bony watchfulness, except for the wiser eyes of the older one. Occasionally she would help the baby, Dino, propped beside her on a sofa cushion. He fed with the same quick, apprehensive silence as the others. The oldest boy, Nick, was deliberately seated at the end of the table farthest from his father, next to his sixteen-year-old kid brother, Joey. Though Nick and Joey were as silent as the rest, there was a bond between them, a wordless communication.

Suddenly the whistle of the 6 o'clock express sounded, and then its thunder was gradually upon them, rattling the windows, fading into the rumbling distance. As if taking advantage of the break in silence, the older girl said in a thin voice: "Can I have some more meat, ma?"

Steve Karkos glanced up, scowled, then returned to the moody contemplation of his plate.

"I guess so," said Mrs. Karkos. So much time on the nest had given her voice a wrung-out quality. "Don't take it all," she added vaguely. "Leave some for your sister."

Joey saw his brother Nick wink at him. He set his fork down, feeling good for no particular reason.

"How's the field stack up at Indianapolis this year, Nick?" he asked softly. "Who's going to be king of the brickyard?"

Nick shook his head thoughtfully while he finished swallowing.

"Hard telling," he said. "That Cuban who took second money at the Michigan Speedway, he looks —"

"Sure, ask *him*," Mr. Karkos broke in. "Anything you want to know, ask the big shot." He seemed to be addressing his plate.

Nick gave his father a look of calm contempt. "— he looks like a real comer," he went on. "If he hadn't took so much time in the pit when he burned out his rear shoe, remember?"

"Say, that's right," Joey said. "He kind of slipped my mind." He picked up his fork, considering the Cuban's

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chances, then set the fork aside again. "Listen," he said eagerly, "I saw a dural metal crash helmet in the ads. White lacquered — only twenty dollars brand-new, including the visor. How about that?"

"Keep it."

"How come?"

"Because it just don't pay to buy junk," Nick said. "Not for something important. Now for my dough —"

Their father slammed his hand on the table, jouncing the plates.

"For *your* dough. When did you ever see twenty dollars?" he shouted. "Or twenty cents, even — unless you stole it somewhere."

"Ah, pop," Joey said quickly, "we were just talking —"

"Out of high school a year," Karkos said, "and what does he do all day? Not to look for work. No, that's not good enough for a big shot —"

"Great, great. We get the idea," Nick said. "Anyway, since when do you give a damn what I do?"

"Since when? I'll show you since when —" Moving fast for a big man, he lunged across the table. Nick ducked, but not quickly enough. His father's broad hand caught him across the cheek, jolting him half out of his chair. "That's since when, wise guy!"

Nick stood up, breathing hard. Color was coming back into the welt. He looked plenty good to Joey: husky, smooth, firm.

"You're good at that," Nick said. "If you was as good with your head, you'd be a millionaire." He turned and headed for the stairs.

"Nikol," Mrs. Karkos called anxiously.

"Let him go," her husband said wearily. "Wise guy. He'll end up in the electric chair, that's how wise he'll be. If he doesn't wrap himself around a telephone pole first."

Joey wasn't hungry any more. "I'm going on upstairs, ma," he said. "I finished."

"That's right," his father said, "go hold his hand. Tell him how good he is."

"Now, Stephan. Nick's young yet. He doesn't *mean* bad . . ."

Trudging up the stairs, Joey heard his mother's voice, puzzled, unsure, trying as always to fumble out the answers when there weren't any.

Easing the bedroom door shut behind him, Joey flopped into a chair. Nick was lying on the bed, smoking and watching the ceiling with no special expression. Joey waited till the cigarette had burned down.

"Butts," he said.

Without looking, Nick extended his arm and Joey took the butt, dragging hoardedly at it. The brothers resembled each other. Both had their father's large, blunt features and dark, heavy hair. But where Nick was tall and evenly proportioned, Joey had yet to grow out of his stocky awkwardness.

The room was drafty and ill-kept; but it was their own and always had been, since Dino slept with his sisters. Along the streaked walls hung a photo of Wilbur Shaw in his winning black Maserati, a blown-up color print of

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an Isotta-Fraschini super-streamliner, and cut-outs from the stack of racing magazines piled in the corner.

Nick finally sat up and faced around. "Well, what's new, kid?"

"We dropped the frame Saturday," Joey said. "Another two inches."

Nick smiled. "You guys still fritzing around with that hopped-up Ford?"

"Yeah, and listen. You know that water-injecting carburetor we chipped in for?"

"What's wrong now?"

"The compression ratio's nowhere. Could you tune it up for us? Tomorrow afternoon, maybe?"

"Can't make it, Joey. I got plans." He reached under the bed and dragged out an imitation leather suitcase. "Like it?" He spanked the dust off it. "Half a buck, over at the pawnshop." He pulled out the bureau drawers and began sorting and tossing his things into the suitcase. "Yeah," he said, "I'm giving this dump a fat kiss goodbye."

Joey had a sudden let-down feeling. "Is it because of Pop?"

"Who, Tarzan? Hell, no, he don't bother me any more. This is the break, kid. I'm in." He stood there smiling broadly, confidently, and Joey began to catch some of his excitement. "I'm driving for Bernie Ramos on Saturday night," he said.

"Bernie Ramos? Gee, Nick, he's real big, isn't he?"

"The biggest," Nick said. "I wouldn't put in with anybody smaller. This is for chips." Joey watched him with a mixture of awe and envy. There was a brooding quality in his face. "Get a job, the old man says. Sure," he said, "I could probably get one somewhere, pumping gas and fixing flats. Break my back for thirty bucks a week, so I can wind up in a cracker-box like this? And even end up in hock to the undertaker? They can keep it! Maybe I'll have a short life, but I'll get there in a hurry." He came out of it, grinning. "You wait, kid. I'll show the old man what money looks like. I'll shove a hatful under his nose. The smell'll probably kill him."

"How's the car handle, Nick? Has it got lots of soup?"

"It's got everything. It's a sweet little boat. There," he tossed a necktie to Joey. "I used to make out pretty well in this. I don't know if it was me or the tie, but you can try your luck."

Joey held the flame-colored silk tie against his shirt, stroking it. It gave him a silky feeling.

"You waited a long time," he said.

"I waited," Nick said earnestly, "and you can bet your bottom buck I earned it. All those years the old man thought I was wasting time, because I wasn't out peddling magazines or something. The months I spent whipping corners, taking alleys so narrow you couldn't make it with an extra paint job. . . ." He began walking up and down the room, unable to stand still. "Learning the car until you're part of it. Growing into it, almost, like an extra cylinder. Un-

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til you're not outside it any more but you think along with it, all in one piece. It's like being with the kind of girl who — ah, the hell with it," he broke off in embarrassment, "you know what I mean."

Joey had never felt so close to his brother before. It was as if he had suddenly grown the same age and was ready to burst into maturity.

"Listen, Nick," he said, "I been practicing, too. I got a few plans of my own —"

"Save it, Joey," Nick said quickly. He looked almost angry. "Wait a while, there's no hurry. Don't get into that nickel and dime stuff. I never did," he said, "at least not since I knew where I was going."

"What about you? You aren't exactly going to have any set-ups."

"That's right, but I'm going for the big purses, kid."

Joey nodded, impressed. "How big, you figure?"

"It all depends. Sometimes you get caught off base," he said. "Then they pick you up with a spoon, and that's your cut of the pie. But for a guy that can stay lucky . . . well, there's no telling."

"What're you going to do with all your money, Nick?"

He laughed. "I'm not greedy, Joey. I just want enough, you know?" He became serious. "No, I plan to stay in just long enough to pick up a few bills, then jump right out again. While I'm all in one piece and can enjoy it. I'll get me a cigar store and sit on my satchel and watch the bottle caps roll in. Maybe handle a little after-hours liquor, take a few bets from the right guys. Everything strictly legitimate." By now he had the few things packed.

"Tell the old lady . . . tell her — ah, hell," said Nick. "Skip it, she wouldn't understand."

"I'll tell her," Joey said. "And good luck."

"I can use it. Of course," he sighed, "it's not like doing it in front of a couple hundred thousand people. Maybe you'll do it that way, Joey — the right way. You got a chance, you're young enough."

"Yeah, gee," Joey said, "I wish I could get to Indianapolis this year."

"We'll go, you and me. I'll have dough by then, lots."

"Will you, Nick, really?"

"That's a promise." He got to his feet and picked up his suitcase. "Well, kid, maybe you'll be reading about me in the papers."

Joey tried to grin. "Maybe. But I don't suppose they'll mention your name."

"I *hope* not."

Joey walked him to the door. "Where you driving, Nick?"

His brother hesitated. "You forget easy, don't you?"

"You know me."

"Well, you know that roadhouse just outside of town? The Wagon Wheel?"

Joey whistled. "That's *real* money."

"Should be," Nick said. "We'll find out when we knock it over Saturday night."

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Many of us think of Bret Harte as having been an on-the-spot recorder of the California gold rush days. That is not quite true. It has been acutely observed that Harte was "really the writer, not of California in '49 and '50, but of California in the middle '50s and even later; the flavor of decay hangs about his mining towns." And here is a good example of that perceptive observation — the third in our series of crime, detective, and mystery short stories by Bret Harte, one of the most important American authors in the development of local-color fiction. "The Story of See Yup" has been somewhat abridged.

THE STORY OF SEE YUP

by BRET HARTE

I DON'T SUPPOSE THAT HIS PROGENITORS ever gave him that name, or, indeed, that it was a *name* at all; but it was currently believed that — as pronounced "See *Up*" — it meant that lifting of the outer angle of the eye common to the Mongolian. In appearance he looked like any other Chinese, wore the ordinary blue cotton blouse and white drawers of the Sampan coolie, and, in spite of the cleanliness and freshness of these garments, always exhaled a singular medicated odor, half opium, half ginger.

Our first interview was characteristic of his patient quality. He had done my washing for several months, but I had never seen him. A meeting had at last become necessary to correct his impressions regarding "buttons" — which he had seemed to consider as mere excrescences, to be removed like superfluous dirt from soiled linen. I had expected him to call at my lodgings, but he had not yet made his appearance. One day, during the noontime recess of the little frontier school over which I presided, I returned rather early. Two or three of the smaller boys, who were loitering about the schoolyard, disappeared with a certain guilty precipitation that I suspected for the moment, but which I presently dismissed from my mind. I passed through the empty schoolroom to my desk, sat down, and began to prepare the coming lessons. Presently I heard a faint sigh. Looking up, I discovered a solitary Oriental sitting in a rigid attitude on a bench with his back to the window. He caught my eye and smiled sadly, but without moving.

"What are you doing here?" I asked sternly.

"Me washee shilts; me talkee 'buttons.' "

"Oh! you're See Yup, are you?"

"Allee same, John."

"Well, come here."

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I continued my work, but he did not move.

"Come here, hang it! Don't you understand?"

"Me shabbee, 'comme yea.' But me no shabbee Mellican boy, who catchee me, allee same. *You* 'comme yea' — *you* shabbee?"

I put down my pen and went over to him. Here I discovered, to my surprise and mortification, that his long pigtail was held hard and fast by the closed window behind him, which the young rascals had shut down upon it, after having first noiselessly fished it outside with a hook and line. I apologized, opened the window, and released him. He did not complain, although he must have been fixed in that uncomfortable position for some minutes, but plunged at once into the business that brought him there.

"But *why* didn't you come to my lodgings?" I asked.

He smiled sadly but intelligently.

"Mishtel Bally [Mr. Barry, my landlord] he owce me five dollee fo washee, washee. He no payee me. He say he knock hellee outee me allee time I come for payee. So me no come *housee*, me come *schoolee*. Shabbee? Mellican boy no good, but not so big as Mellican man. No can hurtee Chinaman so much. Shabbee?"

Alas! I knew that this was mainly true. Mr. James Barry was an Irishman whose finer feelings revolted against paying money to a heathen. I could not find it in my heart to say anything to See Yup about the buttons; indeed, I spoke in complimentary terms about the gloss of my shirts, and I think I meekly begged him to come again for my washing. When I went home I expostulated with Mr. Barry, but I simply made an enemy of him. I did not know that, at the same time, I had made a friend of See Yup!

As our acquaintance progressed, I became frequently the recipient of small presents from him: a pot of preserves of a quality I could not purchase in shops, and whose contents in their crafty, gingery dissimulation so defied definition that I never knew whether they were animal, vegetable, or mineral; and two or three hideous Chinese idols — "for luckee." In return, I gave him some apparently hopeless oral lessons in English, and certain sentences to be copied, which he did with marvelous precision. I remember one instance when this peculiar faculty of imitation had a disastrous result. In setting him a copy, I had blurred a word which I promptly erased, and then traced the letters more distinctly over the scratched surface. To my surprise, See Yup triumphantly produced *his* copy with the erasure itself carefully imitated; in fact, much more neatly done than mine.

In our confidential intercourse, I never seemed to really get nearer to him. In the attention he displayed when new ideas were presented to him there was a slight condescension, as if he were looking down upon them from his three thousand years of history.

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"Don't you think the telegraph wonderful?" I asked one day.

"Very good for Mellican man," he said, with his aimless laugh; "plenty makee him jump!"

I never could tell whether he had confounded it with electro-galvanism, or was only satirizing our American haste and feverishness. He was capable of either.

For that matter, we knew that the Chinese themselves possessed some means of secretly and quickly communicating with one another. Any news of good or ill import to their race was quickly disseminated through the settlement before *we* knew anything about it. An innocent basket of clothes from the wash, sent up from the riverbank, became in some way a library of information; a single slip of rice paper, aimlessly fluttering in the dust of the road, had the mysterious effect of diverging a whole gang of coolies away from our settlement.

When See Yup was not subject to the persecutions of the more ignorant and brutal he was always a source of amusement to all, and I cannot recall an instance when he was ever taken seriously. The miners found diversions even in his alleged frauds and trickeries, whether innocent or retaliatory, and were fond of relating with great gusto his evasion of the Foreign Miners' Tax. This was an oppressive measure aimed principally at the Chinese, who humbly worked the worn-out "tailings" of their Christian fellow miners. It was stated that See Yup, knowing the difficulty — already alluded to — of identifying any particular Chinaman by *name*, conceived the additional idea of confusing recognition by intensifying the monotonous facial expression. Having paid his tax himself to the collector, he at once passed the receipt to his fellows, so that the collector found himself confronted in different parts of the settlement with the receipt and the aimless laugh of, apparently, See Yup himself. Although we all knew that there were a dozen or more Chinese at work in the mines, the collector never was able to collect the tax from more than two — See Yup and one See Yin, — and so great was their facial resemblance that the unfortunate official for a long time hugged himself with the conviction that he had made See Yup *pay twice*, and withheld the money from the government!

One evening I strolled into the barroom of the principal saloon which, so far as mere upholstery and comfort went, was also the principal house in the settlement. The first rains had commenced; the windows were open, for the influence of the southwest trades penetrated even this far-off mountain mining settlement. But, oddly enough, there was a fire in the large central stove, around which the miners had collected, with their steaming boots elevated on a projecting iron railing that encircled it.

They were decidedly a despondent group. For some moments the silence was only broken by a gasp, a sigh, a

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muttered oath, or an impatient change of position. There was nothing in the fortunes of the settlement, nor in their own individual affairs to suggest this gloom. The truth was that they were, one and all, suffering from the pangs of dyspepsia.

Whether it was the result of the nervous, excitable temperament which had brought them together in this feverish hunt for gold; whether it was the quality of the tinned meats or half-cooked provisions they hastily bolted, begrudging the time it took to prepare and to consume them; whether they too often supplanted their meals by tobacco or whiskey, the singular physiological truth remained that these young, finely selected adventurers, living the lives of the natural, aboriginal man, and looking the picture of health and strength, actually suffered more from indigestion than the pampered dwellers of the cities. The quantity of "patent medicines," "bitters," "pills," "panaceas," and "lozenges" sold in the settlement almost exceeded the amount of the regular provisions whose effects they were supposed to correct. The sufferers eagerly scanned advertisements and placards. There were occasional runs on new "specifics," and general conversation eventually turned into a discussion of their respective merits. A certain childlike faith and trust in each new remedy was not the least distressing and pathetic symptom of these grown-up, bearded men.

"Well, gentlemen," said Cyrus Parker, glancing around at his fellow sufferers, "ye kin talk of your patent medicines, and I've tackled 'em all, but only the other day I struck suthin' that I'm goin' to hang on to, you bet."

Every eye was turned moodily to the speaker, but no one said anything.

"And I didn't get it out er advertisements, nor off of circulars. I got it out er my head, just by solid thinking," continued Parker.

"What was it, Cy?" said one unsophisticated and inexperienced sufferer.

Instead of replying Parker, like a true artist, knowing he had the ear of his audience, dramatically flashed a question upon them.

"Did you ever hear of a Chinaman having dyspepsy?"

"Well, no!" chorused the group. They were evidently struck with the fact.

"Of course you didn't," said Parker triumphantly. " 'Cos they *ain't*. Well, gentlemen, it didn't seem to me the square thing that a lot o' yellow-skinned heathens should be built different to a white man and never know the tortur' that a Christian feels; and one day, arter dinner, when I was just a-lyin' flat down on the bank, squirmin' and clutching the short grass to keep from yellin', who should go by but that See Yup, with a grin on his face.

" 'Mellican man plenty playee to him Joss after eatin',' sez he; 'but Chinaman smellee punk, allee same, and no hab got.'

"I knew he was just purtendin' he thought I was prayin' to my Joss, but

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I was that weak I hadn't strength, boys, to heave a rock at him. Yet it gave me an idea."

"What was it?" they asked eagerly.

"I went down to his shop the next day, when he was alone, and I was feeling mighty bad, and I got hold of his pigtail and I allowed I'd stuff it down his throat if he didn't tell me what he meant. Then he took a piece of punk and lit it, put it under my nose and, darn my skin, gentlemen, you migh'n't believe me, but in a minute I felt better, and after a whiff or two I was all right."

"Was it pow'ful strong, Cy?" asked the inexperienced one.

"No," said Parker, "and that's just what's got me. It was a sort o' dreamy, spicy smell, like a hot night. But as I couldn't go 'round 'mong you boys with a lighted piece o' punk in my hand, ez if I was settin' off Fourth of July firecrackers, I asked him if he couldn't fix me up suthin' in another shape that would be handier to use when I was took bad, and I'd reckon to pay him for it like ez I'd pay for any other patent medicine. So he fixed me up this."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a small red paper which, when opened, disclosed a pink powder. It was gravely passed around the group.

"Why, it smells and tastes like ginger," said one.

"It *is* ginger!" said another scornfully.

"Mebbe it is, and mebbe it isn't," returned Cy Parker stoutly. "Mebbe ut's only my fancy. But if it's the sort o' stuff to bring on that fancy, and that fancy *cures* me, it's all the same. I've got about two dollars' worth o' that fancy or that ginger, and I'm going to stick to it. You hear me!" And he carefully put it back in his pocket.

At which criticisms and gibes broke forth. If Cy Parker was going to "demean himself" by consulting a Chinese quack, he'd better buy up a lot o' idols and stand 'em up around his cabin. If he had that sort o' confidences with See Yup, he ought to go to work with him on his cheap tailings, and be fumigated all at the same time. If he'd been smoking an opium pipe, instead of smelling punk, he ought to be man enough to confess it. Yet it was noticeable that they were all very anxious to examine the packet again. But Cy Parker was alike indifferent to demand or entreaty.

A few days later I saw Abe Wynford, one of the party, coming out of See Yup's wash-house. He muttered something in passing about the infamous delay in sending home his washing, but did not linger long in conversation. The next day I met another miner *at* the wash-house, but *he* lingered so long on some trifling details that I finally left him there alone with See Yup. When I called upon Poker Jack of Shasta, there was a singular smell of incense in *his* cabin, which he attributed to the very resinous quality of the fir logs he was burning.

I did not attempt to probe these

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mysteries by any direct appeal to See Yup himself: I respected his reticence; indeed, if I had not, I was quite satisfied that he would have lied to me. Enough that his wash-house was well patronized, and he was decidedly "getting on."

It might have been a month afterwards that Dr. Duchesne was setting a broken bone in the settlement, and after the operation was over, had strolled into the Palmetto Saloon. After he had exchanged salutations with the miners in his usual hearty fashion, and accepted their invitation to drink, Cy Parker with a certain affected carelessness began:

"I've been wantin' to ask ye a question, Doc — a sort o' darned fool question. Ye happen to know anything about the medical practice of Chinamen?"

"*I* don't know," said the doctor bluntly, "and I don't know *anybody* who does."

There was a sudden silence in the bar, and the doctor, putting down his glass, continued with slight professional precision:

"You see, the Chinese know nothing of anatomy from personal observation. Autopsies and dissection are against their superstitions, which declare the human body sacred, and are consequently never practiced."

"You mean ter say that jest because those old women who sarve out yarbs and spring medicines in families don't know anything of anatomy, they ain't fit to give us their simple and nat'ral medicines?"

"But the Chinese medicines are not simple or natural," said the doctor coolly.

"Not simple?" echoed the party, closing round him.

"I don't mean to say," continued the doctor, glancing around at their eager, excited faces with an appearance of wonder, "that they are positively noxious unless taken in large quantities, for they are not drugs at all, but I certainly should not call them 'simple.' Do you know what they principally are?"

"Well, no," said Parker cautiously, "perhaps not *exactly*."

"Come a little closer and I'll tell you."

Not only Parker's head but the others were bent over the counter. Dr. Duchesne uttered a few words in a tone inaudible to the rest of the company. There was a profound silence, broken at last by Abe Wynford's voice:

"Ye kin pour me out about three fingers o' whiskey, Barkeep. I'll take it straight."

"Same to me," said the others.

The men gulped down their liquor; two of them quietly left. The doctor wiped his lips, buttoned his coat, and began to draw on his riding gloves.

"I've heerd," said Poker Jack of Shasta, with a faint smile on his white face, as he toyed with the last drops of liquor in his glass, "that the darned fools sometimes smell punk as a medicine, eh?"

"Yes, *that's* comparatively decent,"

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said the doctor reflectively. "It's only sawdust mixed with a little gum and formic acid."

"Formic acid? Wot's that?"

"A very peculiar acid secreted by ants. It is supposed to be used by them offensively in warfare — just as the skunk, eh?"

But Poker Jack of Shasta hurriedly declared that he wanted to speak to a man who was passing, and disappeared. The doctor walked to the door, mounted his horse, and rode away. I noticed, however, that there was a slight smile on his bronzed, impassive face.

The victims made no attempt to revenge themselves on See Yup. That they had one and all, secretly and unknown to one another, patronized him, there was no doubt; but at the same time, as they evidently were not sure that Dr. Duchesne had not hoaxed them in regard to the quality of See Yup's medicines, they knew that an attack on the unfortunate Oriental would reveal their secret and expose them to the ridicule of their brother miners. So the matter was dropped, and See Yup remained master of the situation.

Meantime he was prospering. The coolie gang he worked on the river, when not engaged in washing clothes, were picking over the "tailings," or refuse of gravel, left on abandoned claims by successful miners. As there was no more expense attending this than in stone-breaking or rag-picking, and the feeding of the coolies, which was ridiculously cheap, there was no doubt that See Yup was reaping a fair weekly return from it; but, as he sent his receipts to San Francisco through coolie managers, after the Chinese custom, and did not use the regular Express Company, there was no way of ascertaining the amount. Again, neither See Yup nor his fellow countrymen ever appeared to have any money about them. In ruder times and more reckless camps, raids were often made by ruffians on their cabins or their traveling gangs, but never with any pecuniary result. This condition, however, it seemed was destined to change.

One Saturday, See Yup walked into Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express office with a package of gold dust which, when duly weighed, was valued at $500. It was consigned to a Chinese company in San Francisco. When the clerk handed See Yup a receipt, he remarked casually:

"Washing seems to pay, See Yup."

"Washee velly good pay. You wantee washee, John?" said See Yup eagerly.

"No, no," said the clerk, with a laugh. "I was only thinking $500 would represent the washing of a good many shirts."

"No leplesent washee shirts at all! Catchee gold dust when washee tailings. Shabbee?"

The clerk did "shabbee," and lifted his eyebrows. The next Saturday, See Yup appeared with another package, worth about $400, directed to the same consignee.

"Didn't pan out quite so rich this

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week, eh?" said the clerk engagingly.

"No," returned See Yup impassively; "next time he payee more."

When the third Saturday came, with the appearance of See Yup and $450 worth of gold dust, the clerk felt he was no longer bound to keep the secret. He communicated it to others, and in twenty-four hours the whole settlement knew that See Yup's coolie company were taking out an average of $400 per week from the refuse and tailings of the old abandoned Palmetto claim!

The astonishment of the settlement was profound. In earlier days jealousy and indignation at the success of these degraded heathens might have taken a more active and aggressive shape, and it would have fared ill with See Yup and his companions. But the settlement had become more prosperous and law-abiding; there were one or two Eastern families there, and its jealousy and indignation were restricted to severe investigation and legal criticism. Fortunately for See Yup, it was old-established mining law that an abandoned claim and its tailings became the property of whoever chose to work it. But it was alleged that See Yup's company had in reality "struck a lead" — discovered a hitherto unknown vein or original deposit of gold not worked by the previous company — and, having failed legally to declare it by pre-emption and public registry in their foolish desire for secrecy, had thus forfeited their right to the property. A surveillance of their working, however, did not establish this theory; the gold that See Yup had sent away was of the kind that might have been found in the tailings overlooked by the late Palmetto owners. Yet it was a very large yield for mere refuse.

"Them Palmetto boys were mighty keerless after they'd made their big strike and got to work on the vein, and I reckon they threw a lot of gold away," said Cy Parker, who remembered their large-handed recklessness in the flush days. "On'y that *we* didn't think it was white man's work to rake over another man's leavin's, we might hev had what them derned Chinamen hev dropped into. Tell ye what, boys, we've been a little too high and mighty, and we'll hev to climb down."

At last the excitement reached its climax, and diplomacy was employed to effect what neither intimidation nor espionage could secure. Under the pretense of desiring to buy out See Yup's company, a select committee of the miners was permitted to examine the property and its workings. They found the great bank of stones and gravel, representing the cast-out débris of the old claim, occupied by See Yup and four or five plodding coolies.

At the end of two hours the committee returned to the saloon bursting with excitement. They spoke under their breath, but enough was gathered to satisfy the curious crowd that See Yup's pile of tailings was rich beyond their expectations.

The committee had seen with their own eyes gold taken out of the sand

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and gravel to the amount of twenty dollars in the two short hours of their examination. And the work had been performed in the stupidest, clumsiest Chinese way. What might not white men do with efficient machinery!

A syndicate was at once formed. See Yup was offered $20,000 if he would sell out and put the syndicate in possession of the claim in twenty-four hours. See Yup received the offer stolidly. As he seemed inclined to hesitate, I am grieved to say that it was intimated to him that if he declined he might be subject to embarrassing and expensive legal proceedings to prove his property, and that companies would be formed to prospect the ground on either side of his heap of tailings.

At last See Yup consented, with the proviso that the money should be paid in gold into the hands of a Chinese agent in San Francisco on the day of the delivery of the claim. The syndicate made no opposition to this characteristic precaution of the Oriental. It was like them not to travel with money, and the implied uncomplimentary suspicion of danger from the community was overlooked.

See Yup departed the day that the syndicate took possession. He came to see me before he went. I congratulated him upon his good fortune; at the same time, I was embarrassed by the conviction that he was unfairly forced into a sale of his property at a figure far below its real value.

At the end of the week it was said that the new company cleared about three hundred dollars. This was not so much as the community had expected, but the syndicate was apparently satisfied, and the new machinery was put in. At the end of the next week the syndicate were silent as to their returns. One of them made a hurried visit to San Francisco. It was said that he was unable to see either See Yup or the agent to whom the money was paid. It was also noticed that there was no Chinese remaining in the settlement. Then the fatal secret was out.

The heap of tailings had probably never yielded See Yup more than twenty dollars a week, the ordinary wage of such an operation. See Yup had conceived the bright idea of "booming" it on a borrowed capital of $500 in gold dust, which he *openly* transmitted by express to his confederate and creditor in San Francisco, who in turn *secretly* sent it back to See Yup by coolie messengers, to be *again* openly transmitted to San Francisco. The same package of gold dust was thus passed backwards and forwards between debtor and creditor, to the grave edification of the Express-Company and the fatal curiosity of the settlement. When the syndicate had gorged the bait thus thrown out, See Yup, on the day the self-invited committee inspected the claim, promptly "salted" the tailings by *conscientiously distributing the gold dust over it* so deftly that it appeared to be its natural composition and yield.

I have only to bid farewell to See Yup and close this reminiscence of a misunderstood man by adding the

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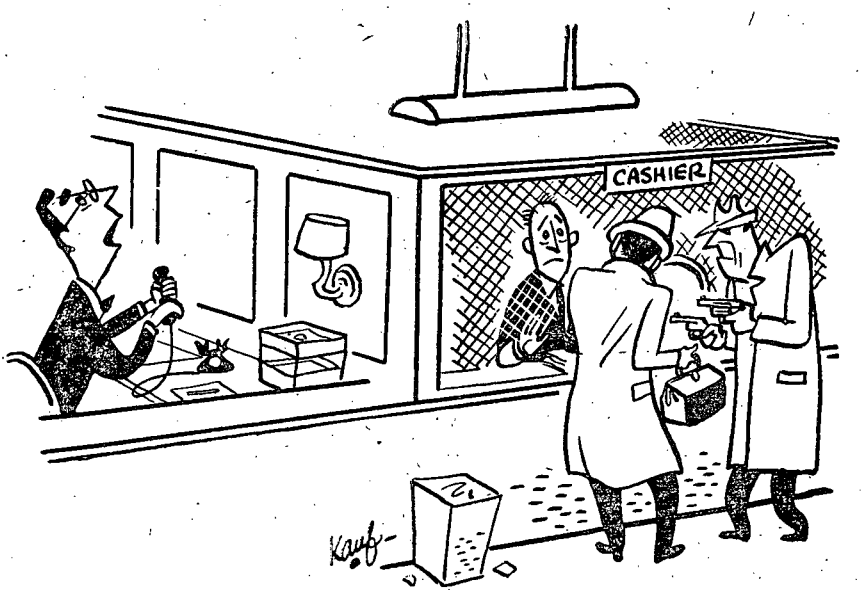
opinion of an eminent jurist in San Francisco to whom the facts were submitted: "So clever was this alleged fraud that it is extremely doubtful if an action would lie against See Yup in the premises, there being no legal evidence of the 'salting,' and none whatever of any actual allegation that the gold dust was the *ordinary* yield of the tailings, that implication resting entirely with the committee who examined it under false pretense, and who subsequently forced the sale by intimidation."



"Hey, Joe! The Police Department says you're accidentally standing on the alarm button again."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELLERY QUEEN**

TITLE: ***Driver's Seat***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Ellery Queen, mystery writer, and his father, Inspector Queen

LOCALE: New York City

COMMENTS: *What happened when Big Dave's widow, formerly a glamorous strip-tease artiste in the Boom-Boom Club, took over the driver's seat of The Mayfield Bros. Mining Company . . .*

THERE WERE FOUR MAYFIELD brothers until Big Dave died. And then there were three, and that was a bad day for all of them. With Big Dave in the driver's seat there had never been any question of where they were going. The withdrawal of his guiding arm left Archibald, Benedict, and Charlton Mayfield steering with their noses. They were bound to land in a ditch sooner or later. Big Dave's widow saw to it that it was sooner . . .

It was the afternoon of the board meeting of The Mayfield Brothers Mining Company. The widow had inherited her husband's quarter holdings in the closed corporation, so now — for the fourth consecutive time — she occupied Big Dave's chair. She was a large young woman with long legs and very blonde hair in albuminous swirls, and her figure was as rich and ornamented as a French pastry.

The three brothers did not mind her presence; it gave a fillip to what had always been a tedious necessity. Or, at least, Archibald and Benedict did not mind; about Charlton it was difficult to say, for he had the mummified exterior and dyspeptic potential of a hot pepper drying on a wall. But Archibald was like a hairless Santa Claus, leanly ruddy and roaring and full of long-legged blonde memories; and he amused himself by tossing his gusty gifts at Daisy Mayfield across the board table as if she were his wife's upstairs maid and his wife were at Newport. Benedict toyed with the widow typically, in smiling silence; he was a mouth-smiler, this Benedict Mayfield, with cold gray skin and blunt eyes.

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But the widow paid no attention to any of the Mayfield brothers until Charlton snapped, "If there's no further new business, I'll entertain a motion —"

Then Daisy looked away from the oil painting of Big Dave and said: "But there is."

Archibald stopped frisking, Benedict's smile took on an edge of interest, Charlton raised his sandpapery brows. They looked at one another as if the polished table had given tongue; and then they looked at her.

"The Mayfield Brothers Mining Company was organized with one hundred shares of stock divided into four equal blocks," said Big Dave's widow. "That is, each of you and Dave put up twenty-five thousand dollars for twenty-five shares. Today the corporation's holdings are worth a hundred times the original investment."

"Hear, hear," roared Archibald.

"Yes, yes, Daisy," grunted Charlton.

"Since Dave's death," she continued, "you three lads have gone haywire. My irresistible brother-in-law Archibald here, for instance, he's been taken to the cleaners by a big parade of cuties. Benedict, you've gone over your wise-guy head in hock to the bookies and gamblers. And Charlton, without Dave to tell you what to do, you've lost your shirt in the stock market. And in the meantime your wives have kept throwing money around as if the company mines diamonds instead of coal.

"So for quite a while now each one of you has been trying to dig himself out of a nice deep hole by selling part of his stock in The Mayfield Brothers Mining Company."

The brothers made little noises.

Daisy Mayfield opened her bag and consulted a slip of paper. "Archibald, the great lover, you've sold nine of your twenty-five shares. Benedict, the great brain, you've sold seven of your twenty-five. And Charlton, the little Napoleon, you've sold ten of yours."

There was a silence. Then Archibald laughed. "I never knew a head went with those shoulders."

Benedict said nothing, but his smile was thoughtful.

"So I wasn't the only one," rasped Charlton, glaring at his brothers. "Daisy, what's the point?"

"In the original agreement you all signed," replied the widow briskly, "there's a certain clause that was put in to prevent what's happened. It says that if any partner in the corporation gets stock control, *he can buy out the others at the original cost of their stock*."

The brothers jerked.

Charlton showed his spiked teeth. "What about it? No one's got stock control of the company!"

"Wrong, brother-in-law," said the sister-in-law. "The shares you three sold were bought through dummies . . . *by me*. Your ten, Charlton. Your seven, Benedict. Your nine, Archibald. That's twenty-six shares I bought up from the three of you. And

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I own Dave's twenty-five. Add it up. It's fifty-one, and it gives me legal control.

"And," said the woman, very gently, "I'm exercising my rights under the agreement." She rummaged in her bag. "I have here," she said, "three certified checks. A sixteen-thousand dollar check for your remaining sixteen shares, Archibald. An eighteen-thousand dollar check for your remaining eighteen shares, Benedict. And a fifteen-thousand dollar check for your remaining fifteen shares, Charlton. Pony up that stock."

When Archibald found his voice, it came out blasting. "Sixteen thousand! Why, my sixteen shares are worth more than a million and a half! Do you think you can buy me out at one cent on the dollar?"

"Your lawyer can answer that."

Charlton Mayfield was purple to the tips of his ears. "Benedict," he spluttered, "do you remember anything like that in the original agreement? Is this — is she right?"

Benedict nodded slowly, his eyes on the widow.

Charlton snarled, "Why, you cheap — You don't think you're going to get away with this!"

"Shut up, Charlton." Archibald came around the table to slip his arm about Daisy's shoulders. "Why don't you and I go somewhere, baby, and . . . talk this over?"

She got up so suddenly that the handsome brother almost lost his balance. "I'll give you three exactly one week to let your lawyers convince you that you'd be crazy to try to break that agreement in court. They'll tell you your haven't a prayer, but I guess you'll want to be told." She dropped the three checks into her bag and turned to go.

But now Benedict spoke for the first time. "One question, Daisy."

"Yes?"

"Why?"

Daisy Mayfield leaned on the table, and its high gloss reflected something bitter, and triumphant, too. "Big Dave took me out of the strip stable in the Boom Boom Club. He was a good business man, Dave was. He knew a bargain when he saw one. He bought me for a two-buck license and a five-dollar bill to the J. P. and he always said I turned out the best deal he'd ever made. Well, he was right. He gave me respectability, and I gave him the ten happiest years of his life.

"And I'd have been happy, too — if not for you three and your grand dames. From the way you and your wives have treated me, anybody'd think Dave married a dead whale. No class. Didn't know all the forks. Took my degree at Roseland, and post-graduate work stripping in front of a bunch of drunks. It wasn't as if I didn't care. I tried, hard. I tried not to shame you. I even took lessons in how to come into a room without reaching for a zipper. But I was poison . . . If it was just you jerks, I wouldn't have minded so much. But those high-class babes of yours really gave it to me, and that I couldn't

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take. I made up my mind that if I ever could pay you back . . ."

Big Dave's widow straightened up, breathing as if she had been running. But when she spoke again, her voice was a cold metallic vehicle for the deadly words: "One week from today you three be at my house between 2 and 3 P.M. With your stock."

Ellery found his father standing outside the David Mayfield mansion on the East River. It had been raining since morning and Ellery had to splash through puddles to join the Inspector under the *porte-cochère*.

"Was this trip necessary?" grumbled Ellery, shaking the rain from his hat. "And if so, why couldn't the taxi deposit me decently under the roof?" The protected part of the driveway was roped off.

"Tire tracks," said Inspector Queen. "I thought you'd want to sit in, Ellery. It's murder, it's nasty, and . . . I don't know."

Ellery perked up and looked at the tire marks. "Who, how, when, and why?"

"Mrs. Daisy Mayfield, ex-club stripper. Stabbed to death between 2 and 3 this P.M. by one of her three brothers-in-law. I've got the whole story from her lawyer." And the Inspector told Ellery of the mining company board meeting of the previous week and Big Dave's widow's stock coup. "So I guess they found out she was right when she told them they'd be wasting their time and money trying to beat her in court — and as a result she's lying in there in her library, still with the three certified checks, the deadest dame you ever saw. She was alone in the house — she'd given up all her servants when her husband died."

"What about these tire marks?"

"Three cars rolled up here one at a time," said Inspector Queen with a sigh. "The marks identify the cars as a Cadillac, a Rolls-Royce, and a Chevrolet — and from the overlapping of the treads, they came in that order. The Caddy is a '51 town car belonging to Charlton; the Rolls is a second-hand job Benedict picked up cheap in London last year; the Chevy is Archibald's. I've sweated the three gents and they've admitted coming here between 2 and 3 today, separately and alone, about fifteen-twenty minutes apart."

"And their stories are?" murmured Ellery.

"Identical. It's collusion, of course; they were all ready for me. They probably drew lots, and the brother who got tagged for the party is being covered up by the other two. Each one says she was already dead when he got here, and that he was scared and ran."

"They'd have to say that," said Ellery reflectively, "otherwise how would they account for their stock not having been turned over to her? Let's have a look at the lady."

Big Dave's widow was a mess. Whichever brother had stabbed her with the hunting-knife letter opener

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from Big Dave's desk had wielded it with passion many times.

"What's this?" Ellery had picked up a man's raincoat. The raincoat was slightly damp, the lower part of the right sleeve was rain-soaked, and the front of the coat was smeared untidily and redly. It was of medium size, not new.

"We found it rolled up under that leather chair. She fought for her life and he got her blood all over his coat. Rather than risk being caught, or even seen, with the coat in this condition, he left it here."

"A bad mistake," said Ellery.

"You think so? You won't find any identifying marks, the pockets were clean — not even of lint and dust, all three brothers owned raincoats like this at one time or other, and they all wear a medium size. Each one denies it's his coat and says he can't produce his own coat because he discarded it long ago. So we don't get at him through elimination."

"There are other ways," remarked Ellery.

"Yes," said his father, "we'll do a sweat, hair, and dust analysis, but they're not always conclusive. I have a hunch we won't get any more out of the coat than we did out of the knife. It doesn't show a print."

"I disagree."

"You see something I missed?" said the Inspector. "In the coat?"

"Yes, dad. Something that indicates exactly which brother killed Big Dave's widow.

"And with nothing up my sleeve, dad," Ellery continued with a grin, "although with something definitely up *his*.

"Look at this coat. It's slightly damp from the rain, but the lower part of the right sleeve is rain-*soaked*. How did that part of the sleeve get soaked while the rest of the sleeve — in fact, the rest of the coat — merely got a little damp? The brothers came here separately, at different times, each alone in his car. It's rained all day. So the wearer of this coat drove a car in the rain. In driving a car in the rain, especially in city traffic, what do you habitually do which will get one of your coat sleeves wet?"

"Give arm signals for stops and turns . . ." Inspector Queen looked puzzled. "But the driver always signals with his left arm, and it's the right sleeve of this coat that's rain-soaked."

"Conclusion: This driver signaled with his right arm."

"But to be able to do that —" The Inspector stopped. Then he said, slowly, "*His car has a right-hand drive.*"

"Charlton's Cadillac and Archibald's Chevrolet — American cars — have left-hand drives," said Ellery, nodding. "But the other car is a Rolls-Royce — British; and what's more, a Rolls bought second-hand in London, so it has to have a right-hand drive. Indicating the owner of the Rolls — Benedict. By the way, dad, what's he look like?"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Charlotte Morris's "It Might Be George" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. It is a warm, human drama of a family that might be living next door to you right now . . . The author was born in New York City and spent the first ten years of her life traveling with her parents between New York and San Francisco. Her schooling was a "shuttling" affair: she remembers learning long division in a Pullman car and the layout of the solar system on the oval parlor table at her grandmother's. As the luck of geography had it, she was graduated in the East — from Hunter High and Hunter College. The latter occurred at a difficult time — the bottom of the Great Depression — and after "traipsing from one employment agency to another . . . and taking whatever temporary jobs came along," Miss Morris finally wound up as a file clerk. When the war exploded, she enlisted in the WAAC and served on active duty for three years. Since 1946 she has been working in Washington for the Veterans Administration, and writing in "what is sometimes referred to as spare time" — namely, weekday nights, when the flame of vitality still burns, and weekends, when fatigue is not overwhelming. Nevertheless, Miss Morris is making impressive progress: she is more than half finished with her first novel, and in spare "spare time" is slowly meditating on the second. We hope that EQMM's publication of her "first story" is exactly the encouragement Miss Morris needs to persevere . . .

IT MIGHT BE GEORGE

by CHARLOTTE MORRIS

I WAS WASHING THE DINNER DISHES when the doorbell rang, I heard Dave go to answer it. Aunt Tina came out of the first-floor bedroom, and I went out into the hall.

"Why don't you rest a little, Aunt Tina?" I said. "You know one of us is always around to answer the door."

"I thought it might be George," she said.

I took her arm. "Let's go back to your room," I said. "I'll fix the pillows for you. You know what the doctor said." She shook her little head with its wonderful crest of white hair.

"I don't sleep any more," she said.

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After all, what did it matter what the doctor said? When a woman gets to be 84, it seems to me she should be allowed to do what she wants.

"Would you like to play cards tonight?"

"No, child. Not tonight."

I'll be 40 in a few months, and Aunt Tina still called me "child" occasionally. I have no brothers or sisters, and my parents died when I was very small. Aunt Tina brought me up — Aunt Tina and Uncle Paul. But he died ten years ago.

She took my hand from her arm gently. "Now don't you worry about me," she said.

I watched her go back to her room and settle in her chair. She was so tiny she seemed lost in it. Her breathing was as light as a bird's. Lately I'd found myself listening for it. I'd come down often in the night to see if she was all right. I had a fear that she would be alone when it happened.

She was sitting so quietly now, her eyes were so wide as she stared out the window into the summer twilight, that I knew she was waiting for George.

I stood in the hall with the dish towel still in my hands, wishing I were wiser. It was only in the past few months that she'd begun to talk about George again after all these years — about from the time Katie Dallery came back to New York and looked us up. And now she was waiting for him.

My cousin, George Robey, was about 28 when he disappeared. I was the only one in the house that night, and I was five years old. Uncle Paul was a Mason and he had taken Aunt Tina to one of their affairs; I had been put into the big bed in their room so I could hear George moving about and not be afraid.

I don't know how long I slept or why I waked. But it was dark when I opened my eyes. I was still in the big, double bed — my aunt and uncle hadn't come home yet. I called to George to make sure he was there, and he came in almost immediately and told me to go back to sleep. He had his hat and coat on, and I must have asked him if he were going out. He said "Yes," and it's a funny thing to remember after all these years, but it seems to me I can remember his telling me not to open the door to anyone if the bell rang — that they all had their keys. But then that was something I was always told if I were to be alone in the house, so maybe I was wrong and he didn't say it that night.

He said he'd be "right back" and I was not to be afraid. But whether he meant that, or whether it was something said merely to pacify a child who was afraid to be alone I don't know and never have, and neither did anyone else. I think I asked him where he was going, and I thought he said "To Katie's," or "To Katie's house," or something of the sort. But again that was something I had so often heard him say when he was going out that maybe I was wrong about that, too.

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He went then, and none of us ever saw or heard of him again. He left no note, and that was all I could tell them next morning when they asked me, and in the days after that when they asked me again and again.

Some of his clothes were gone — not all — and a suitcase; and they found out later that he had taken all his money out of the bank that day. So naturally everyone decided he must have left of his own accord and meant to stay away. For a day or so my aunt kept thinking George had gone off on a business trip. I'm sure she must have thought he had left some message with me, because she made me repeat over and over again what he had said or what I had thought he said.

Aunt Tina didn't like to call his office because, if it turned out there was nothing wrong, it would have been embarrassing for him. She did, of course, call Katie Dallery, but Katie was away from home visiting her grandmother in New Jersey and had been away for a week. Mr. Dallery told Aunt Tina that George had certainly not been to their house that night. Everyone was quite sure that I misunderstood what George said. I sometimes wonder now if I did not dream that I even saw him that night.

George worked in a bank. When Uncle Paul finally called them, they were quite upset. They had the auditors in right away, but there was nothing wrong. Not a penny out of the way. After that the bank lost interest in George.

The police were notified, of course, but — well, there was the suitcase and his clothes gone, and his money taken out of the bank, what there was of it. George had been paying for the little house he and Katie were to live in, and he had made a deposit on the furniture, so there wasn't much left.

Then there was the awful day when Uncle Paul had to go down to the morgue to look at a young man who had fallen under an El train. Aunt Tina insisted on going with him, and I was sent to spend the day with Mrs. Dallery, Katie's mother. I was told later that Mrs. Dallery was expecting another baby at that time — her seventh, the one she named Nora — and the whole thing must have been doubly hard on her. I sat on a high stool in the kitchen and watched her make cookies that she said were for me, but she forgot to give them to me. Though I was as troubled as a child of five can be, I still remember looking at those cookies longingly when they were done but afraid to ask for them.

Katie had come home from New Jersey, but I wasn't allowed to see her — she was in a terrible state and Mrs. Dallery was keeping her in bed. While we were in the kitchen I could hear Katie crying in the bedroom, and after a while she began to scream and laugh and Mrs. Dallery rushed in to her and stayed a long time. Poor Katie — she was only eighteen herself. I waited in the kitchen, frightened and wishing my aunt would come so I could go home.

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It was Uncle Paul who came for me, though. He had taken Aunt Tina home first. She was quietly getting dinner when we got there, but they both looked tired and sick. The man in the morgue wasn't George, and as far as I can remember we didn't hear from the police again. Looking back, it's clear the police were satisfied that George had chosen to leave home for some reason of his own, and that it wasn't a case for them.

But "George wouldn't do that to us," Aunt Tina kept insisting. And she and Uncle Paul wracked their brains to imagine some reason why he should have gone away. Because you had to come back to that. He had gone away.

"But he never meant not to let us know," Aunt Tina would insist. "George would never do anything to worry us even if he were unhappy about something." And she would ask me again if there weren't *something* George said that I hadn't told them.

He and Katie were to have been married in three months, in June. They had picked out a house in the suburbs — George with his steady job could manage it, and he had wanted a place with a bit of land where he could putter around. Katie had chosen her silver pattern and the dressmaker was working on her wedding dress. They had chosen some of their furniture and, as I said, George had put a deposit on it. Why should he have gone away like that?

My aunt and uncle had some money, but they made themselves poor trying to find some trace of him. You might say his disappearance broke their hearts, though they went on living as they had to, and after a while even stopped talking about it.

Everyone else forgot. Even poor Katie Dallery, who had been so broken up she had to spend months in a sanitarium, then married someone else after a few years and went out west to live. Long before that, the Dallerys moved out of the old neighborhood. Mrs. Dallery used to stop in regularly with her youngest baby, Nora, to see Aunt Tina, but when Mr. Dallery died about a year after Katie's marriage, she moved out west to live with Katie. Mrs. Dallery corresponded with Aunt Tina at first, but gradually that stopped. I was about twelve years old the last time we heard from her.

The house that George and Katie would have lived in was torn down years ago, and the neighborhood where Aunt Tina and Uncle Paul and I lived at that time has been a slum section for a good fifteen years. I've been married to Dave for longer than that — my oldest will graduate from high school next year. Why, George himself would be past 60 now! It was all so long ago that even Aunt Tina hasn't mentioned George in years.

And then Katie Dallery came back, early last May. She had a boy about ten years old with her, and I thought she must have rung my bell to ask the way somewhere. It happens every once in a while. Strangers have a hard

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time finding their way around Staten Island.

"I'm looking for Mrs. Robey," she said, not knowing me any more than I knew her. "Does she still live here?"

"Yes," I said. "Will you come in?"

I took them into the living room, and she said, "Would you tell Mrs. Robey it's Mrs. Hagen calling? Katie Dallery that was."

I looked at her and for the life of me couldn't think of a thing to say. Katie Dallery was in her late fifties. There wasn't a trace left of the tall black-haired girl with the deep blue eyes and the fine white skin.

"I'm Mrs. Proctor," I said. "I used to be Margaret Robey."

I was as much of a shock to her as she was to me. She peered at me — Katie was always near-sighted — and "Maggie?" she said. "It's never little Maggie!"

And just then Aunt Tina called from the hall. Her hearing is still very keen.

"Katie?" she called. "Is that you, Katie? Is George with you?" The hair stood up on my head and poor Katie turned white as a sheet.

Aunt Tina came into the living room, tiny and old and neat, with her brown eyes very bright on Katie's face.

"Katie, how are you, Katie?" she asked in her sweet, high voice. "It's so nice to see you again, my dear."

Katie fumbled with her eyeglasses and took Aunt Tina's outstretched hand in both her own.

"Ah, it's been a long time, Mother Robey," she said, her eyes filling with tears as easily as they had in the old days. She groped in her handbag for a handkerchief. The boy watched her, his thin freckled face embarrassed and exasperated. Finally he reached over and pulled the handkerchief from her bag and handed it to her.

"She always cries," he explained to Aunt Tina. "It's her nature."

Katie wiped her eyes. "None of your lip, young man!" She boxed his ear, but lightly. He jerked his head out of the way and glowered at her. His carefully combed and wetted hair was beginning to dry out and stand up.

"The spit and image of his mother," said Katie fondly. "My nephew, Jimmy Burns — my sister Nora's boy. You remember Nora, Mrs. Robey? — Ma's last baby?" Katie gave a final swipe at her eyes, blew her nose, and put the handkerchief away. "Nora's not been well since her second came, and we've taken the boy off her hands for the summer."

We talked all that afternoon. Jimmy fidgeted in his chair and played with the crocheted shade pull until my two came home from school and took him out to the yard. I made coffee and served the cake I'd been saving for dinner. Dave came home and was introduced, and they left, and that was all that happened.

Then one morning a few days later, while we were in the kitchen, Aunt Tina began to talk about George out of a clear blue sky, and she kept it up

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after that — as though George had gone out an hour before to the corner store. She got to listening for footsteps coming up the walk, and running out at the sound of the doorbell or the telephone, and watching for the mailman — just as she used to in those first years after George disappeared. She was so natural about it that sometimes, forgetting ourselves, the rest of us would listen and wait, too. Aunt Tina got worse each time Katie came to visit us.

And yet I couldn't very well tell Katie to stay away. What excuse would I have? Besides, it would be unkind to her and the boy — particularly the boy. Katie's nephew had never lived in a big city before, he had no feeling for it, and the dingy flat in midtown Manhattan which was all Katie and her husband could get was cramped. Even after my children had gone to camp — I sent them as soon as school closed — Jimmy Burns was happiest working with Dave in our little vegetable patch behind the house.

I suggested to Katie that she send Jimmy to camp along with the children, but she said, "It's like this, Maggie. The boy's not mine, and if anything was to happen to him at camp — you know, swimming or boating or a fall or something — what could I say to Nora?"

So what could I do except tell Katie to bring him over as often as she could? Though I'd have been happier if they hadn't come at all . . .

Aunt Tina stirred in her chair by the window, and I bent to pick up my dish towel. I felt depressed and angry, watching her wait for George to come back after 35 years.

I heard the door close. Dave came down the hall.

"Is she sleeping?" he whispered. I shook my head and went back to the kitchen to finish my work.

Dave dried the dishes while I washed. It's funny how Dave always seems to know what I'm thinking and feeling. When we were finished, he made me walk down to the store with him to get some ice cream, and when we got back he coaxed Aunt Tina out of her room to have some with us. We talked and Dave even flirted with her a little, and things became quite normal.

About 10 o'clock the phone rang — Katie calling to make sure we were expecting Jimmy the next morning, which was Saturday. She and her husband were going to visit some relatives of his for the day. I asked her what ferry the boy would come on, and I told her that Dave would meet him with the car on the Staten Island side. She said she'd call Saturday night when they were ready to come for him. It wouldn't be late, she said.

After that, Dave got out the cribbage board and we played until 11, when I saw Aunt Tina to bed. Then Dave and I went upstairs.

The night was stuffy and I didn't expect to sleep, but I slept heavily. And then — *there was the sound of a woman crying somewhere outside my*

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room, and I knew the sound of that crying, and the door opened and my cousin George came in in his hat and coat.

"Are you going out, George?" I asked him. "Where are you going, George?"

"I'll be back soon," George said. He looked very young in his old-fashioned coat and hat, and vague, like a photograph that was taken a long time ago.

"Where are you going, George?" I asked him again.

"To see Katie," he said. "To see Katie."

"I'm afraid, George. You won't come back. Don't leave me alone."

"Don't be afraid, Maggie. I'll be right back," he said.

"No, you won't, George," I said. "Don't go."

"I have to go, Maggie. Katie is waiting for me."

"George, there's someone at the door," I said. There was someone at the door — a dark shadow. "There's someone at the door, George."

"There's no one there, Maggie. I have to go now. Don't be afraid."

He bent over and kissed me on the forehead and straightened the covers over me. Then he went to the door in his old-fashioned hat and coat and opened it and went out and closed the door behind him very quietly. I heard him going down the hall to the front door, and there was someone with him — I heard two sets of footsteps, one of them a woman's, because I could hear the heels. I heard the front door open and something bump against it.

"That's the suitcase," I said to myself, and I heard the door close and I began to cry.

My eyes snapped open. The room was dark and hot and still. My mouth was dry, and I was sweating. I got up and tiptoed downstairs.

Aunt Tina's door was standing open to catch the air, but I couldn't hear a sound. I looked in. She was sitting in the chair by the window — I could see her white nightgown. I listened for her breathing and finally heard it. Then I went into the dark living room and sat there for almost an hour before I went upstairs again.

This time I didn't fall asleep until the light came. When I awoke I had a headache and I felt dull and tired. But my dream was still clear in my mind, and I knew what I was going to do — as if I had dreamed that, too.

Dave picked Jimmy up at the ferry about 10 o'clock. I gave them an early lunch and they went out into the garden. The day was a scorcher. I could hear them talking and laughing out there while I worked about the house. Aunt Tina was exhausted by the heat and dozed in her chair most of the day.

Late in the afternoon, Dave and Jimmy put on bathing trunks and played the hose on each other. I got dinner — everything Jimmy liked — and when they came in I sent them for ice cream for dessert. After dinner I chased them out back for some air while I cleaned up the kitchen. I hoped Katie would phone then; she

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had said it wouldn't be late. But I finished the dishes and swept the floor and dawdled as long as I could, and still she hadn't called. So I had to go out and sit with the others.

Dave talked, but I hardly knew what he was saying. I kept listening for the phone in the house . . .

It was almost dark before it rang.

"I'll go," I said, jumping up.

I ran into the house and picked up the phone. Until I heard myself talking I wasn't really sure I would do it. Katie's voice was full and resonant, like the voice of a much younger woman. She was apologizing for not having called sooner. She and Hagen were just about to leave, she said, and they'd be at our place before 11 to pick up Jimmy.

"But Katie," I said, "Jimmy isn't here. I've been trying to call your apartment all day. He didn't come. I thought you must have changed your mind and taken him with you."

"Maggie," she said. "He's not with us! Maggie, are you sure? Maybe Dave missed him at the ferry and the boy's lost."

"Oh, no," I said. "Dave met every ferry until three this afternoon, and Jimmy didn't come on any of them." The words came out so smoothly and I was so calm, it was just as though they were true. "Are you sure you told him how to get to the ferry? After all, he's never come alone before."

"But I told him *exactly*—" I could almost see over the phone how Katie's forehead was wrinkling. She wasn't frightened yet, just puzzled, a little worried. "Maybe I'd better come over," she said.

"I think maybe you'd better go right home," I told her. "Probably he couldn't find his way and had to go home. Does he have a key?"

"No, he doesn't," Katie said. "You're right, Maggie. We'd best get right home. He'll be starved."

"Call and let me know when you get there," I said, and I hung up.

I went outside again.

"It was your Aunt Katie," I told Jimmy. "They've decided to stay overnight where they are, and she wanted to know if you could stay here for tonight, and maybe tomorrow."

"Oh, gee, that's swell!" said Jimmy.

I thought Dave was looking at me, but it was dark and he didn't say anything. I felt restless. "I'll see about clean sheets," I said. "Jimmy can sleep in Eddie's bed."

"Better get a good night's rest," Dave said later as we got ready for bed. "It'll be a hard day tomorrow."

"What do you mean?" I felt a little frightened.

"Paper says it'll be hot and humid again."

"Oh."

He turned out the lights.

The phone rang again a little past midnight. I wasn't asleep. I'd been waiting for it and I was out of bed and downstairs almost before the second ring was finished. I had an idea that Dave was awake and heard it, but he hadn't moved.

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It was Katie, of course. She sounded really worried this time.

"He's not here, Maggie!" she said. "I don't know what to do. Hagen's out looking for him now. Do you think maybe something's happened to him?"

"You'd have heard about it by this time," I said. "Bad news travels fast. Probably he's at one of the neighbors', or maybe in the park. You'll see. He'll come wandering in without the least idea you've been worried. You know how boys are."

"Well, I don't know —" But she sounded somewhat reassured. "Hagen thinks maybe we should call the police."

"Oh, I don't think so," I said. "It'd look pretty silly if he just came wandering in in an hour or so."

"All right, Maggie," Katie said. "I don't want to be disturbing you people any more tonight. But you'll let me know if you hear anything?" I promised I would, and she hung up.

I slept very well the rest of the night. I wasn't worried about her calling the police. I knew Katie — I grew up with a whole neighborhood of Katies. They didn't call the police lightly.

The next day, Sunday, was hot and humid, as the paper had predicted. Aunt Tina was exhausted and didn't get up at all. I was nervous and edgy. Jimmy's running in and out of the house, the sound of his voice and Dave's, both happy and untroubled, wore on me.

Katie called in the morning, and again at 1:30, to say they still had no word of Jimmy. She sounded frightened now, and tired.

I did all the things that had to be done. I straightened the house and got dinner and saw to Aunt Tina. As long as I could keep busy and didn't have to talk much to anyone, I was all right. But I dreaded the afternoon when there would be nothing to do — when Dave would expect me to sit out on the porch and talk to him.

We had dinner just after Katie called the second time, and then Dave suggested we drive down to the beach — maybe there was a breeze there. I told him I didn't want to leave Aunt Tina and didn't think she was well enough to come along. So he and Jimmy got their bathing trunks and drove off, promising to be back early for supper. I pulled down the shades to keep the house as cool as possible and sat down to write my weekly letter to the children at camp. I made myself write until I had covered two pages. Then I walked to the corner and mailed the letter.

The afternoon seemed endless. I sat with Aunt Tina a while, but she dozed and I couldn't seem to sit still. I kept waiting for the phone to ring, and the fact that it didn't made me nervous. I thought of going out on the porch, but somehow I didn't want to be where people could see me. It was a funny feeling, like hiding from something.

Dave and Jimmy got back early, as they had promised, and I gave them supper. I didn't eat myself; it

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was too hot to eat, I said. I told Jimmy he was to stay the night again, that his aunt Katie had called.

After I had wiped the dishes I knew I couldn't stand it any more. I told Dave I thought I'd go over to visit Molly Tiernan for a while. It was the first excuse I could think of.

I'd never been to Katie's before, but I knew the neighborhood and I had her address.

I didn't know what I was going to do when I got there — I can't even remember much about the ferry ride over except that there was a kind of dreadful sense of hurry to it. And then I found myself inside the dingy old building where Katie lived, walking down the long empty hall — dimly lighted and with a fusty smell to it — that led to her apartment.

My heart was beating very fast when I pushed the doorbell. There was a ringing, uneasy silence, then quick heavy footsteps and the door was snatched open. It was Katie, and when I saw her face in the yellow light of the hall I was afraid of what I had done to her. Her face had gone all soft and hanging as though some padding had been taken out, and her eyes were way back in her head, ringed with dark flesh that glistened with perspiration. She had left off her corset, and her body sagged under a shapeless dark wrapper.

But then I said to myself, Katie's had only a night and a day of it, and Aunt Tina has had thirty-five years.

"Oh," she said. Her voice was dull. "Come in, Maggie. She turned listlessly away, and I came in and closed the door. The apartment was darker than the street outside, with not a light turned on, and it was stiflingly close.

I followed her to the front room. The big chair at the window creaked and gave under her weight as she sank into it. I took the chair by the other window, a leather Morris chair, sticky in the heat. The two windows were open, but no one had remembered to raise the awnings. The noise of street cars and automobiles and voices came up from the street in a continuous unbearable din. My nerves were so tight the street cars seemed to be screeching along right in my head.

"You're alone, Katie?" I said.

"Hagen's out looking," she said in the same dull voice. "He's been out all day. If he didn't find Jimmy by tonight, he said, he was going to the police."

"But you mustn't sit here in the dark. Let me turn on the light."

"No — no!" The idea seemed to disturb her. "I don't want the light on."

"Have you eaten?" I asked. She shook her head. "Katie, you must eat something," I said. "Let me get you something. You must keep up your strength."

"It'd choke me," she said. "It'd choke me."

"Some tea, then. I'll make it. You must have something." I stood up quickly before she could speak. "The kitchen's in the back, isn't it?"

She clasped her hands and rocked back and forth in the chair.

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"Oh, Maggie, I'm a wicked woman," she said. "A wicked woman." She kept rocking back and forth like a woman at a wake. I put my hand on her heavy hot shoulder and I felt like Judas when he gave the kiss.

But I said, "It's nothing to blame yourself for, Katie. Most boys run away from home some time. He'll be back."

"It's not that," she said. "You don't understand." Her fat hands twisted in her lap. "Jimmy wouldn't run away. Something's happened to him — something's happened to him." Her voice rose hysterically and I patted her shoulder.

"I'll get some tea," I said. "You must pull yourself together, Katie. This isn't doing any good." I went back to the kitchen and her voice followed me in a monotonous singsong: "— something's happened to him. It's the truth. I'm wicked — a wicked woman."

I put on the light in the kitchen and stood still for a minute. My stomach was knotting way down inside me and all the muscles across my shoulders felt hard. All of a sudden I wanted to cry.

The kitchen had one narrow window, open on the court. I could hear a clatter of dishes from across the way. Down in the court a radio was going very loud and someone was practising the piano — *da dum da dum da dee da da*. The curtains hung at the window, limp as rags. I looked around, wondering where things were. There were dirty dishes in the sink and on the table and they had been standing a long while. Since breakfast or the night before, I thought . . . But then I thought of Aunt Tina quietly getting dinner the night she and Uncle Paul came home from the morgue.

I could hear Katie crying in the living room, and I remembered her crying in her bedroom the day I sat in the Dallery kitchen watching Mrs. Dallery make the cookies. I remembered how, after that, Katie had begun to scream and laugh, and I thought to myself that if she did that now, I'd run from the house.

"Don't be such a coward," I told myself.

I carried the pitcher and a glass — only one, I didn't want any tea — into the living room.

"Stop crying now, Katie," I said firmly. I put the tray down on a table that swayed under its weight. "Here —" I gave her a tissue from my bag — "dry your eyes and drink the tea."

She wiped her eyes obediently, and I poured a glassful for her.

"Drink it now," I said. "It's cold. It'll make you feel better." I brushed the hair back from her damp forehead and had to grit my teeth to make myself do it.

She sighed exhaustedly. "Ah, you're a good girl, Maggie. A good girl." And she drank part of the tea. "That's good," she said. She pushed vaguely at her hair. "I got no sleep at all last night, Maggie," she said. "I spent half the night hanging out the win-

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dow, listening for him to come home. I thought I heard his footsteps a dozen times, and when I went to bed I kept half dreaming I'd heard the door open and him come in, and I'd get up and come out to see if he was in his bed." She pushed at her hair again. "It's so hot," she sighed.

I sat quiet.

"He's gone like George," Katie whispered. "Like George, Maggie. It's been thirty-five years since I went to confession. It's a judgment on me."

Her eyes stared beyond me, and yet she was speaking to me.

"Maggie, you remember the night George left the house? I was there that night. I stood in the doorway of the bedroom while he said goodbye to you, and I went out with him. Do you remember that night, Maggie? — in March, it was? — cold and drizzly and with a fog in the air?"

She swallowed hard as though she were sick.

"I was going to have a baby, Maggie, and we couldn't wait for the wedding in June. I was visiting Gramma Keogh in New Jersey when I found out. I was going half crazy, Maggie. I didn't know what to do. I wrote George and told him, and he came right out to see me and said we'd be married right away and no one would know. We'd elope." Katie swallowed hard again and wiped her lips with the back of her hand. "Only he wanted to finish the week out at the bank first," she said.

"He said he'd pick me up at Grandma's the next Saturday morning, and we'd be married and away on a honeymoon before anyone could ask questions. He said he still had enough money left in the bank for the honeymoon, and he'd take it out and everything would be all right. But after he left I sat there the livelong day at Grandma's, my mind going round and round. I kept thinking; suppose he doesn't come. I kept thinking what Ma had told me about men . . . I got that crazy I couldn't wait any more. I was so scared, Maggie."

The room was so dark now that Katie was only a dim shadow in it.

"I made an excuse to Gramma to go into town that evening. Thursday, it was, and I knew it was the night of Mr. Robey's lodge. I came straight up to the house. You were in bed and I remember George saying —

" 'You'll wake the child, Katie. Please don't take on so.' I was crying so, you see. Then at last he said —

" 'All right. We'll go away tonight. I drew the money out of the bank yesterday. We can't get married tonight, but I'll take you back to your grandmother's.' — I wouldn't go home, Maggie. I was afraid to look at them at home —

" 'I'll take you back to your grandmother's,' George said, 'and you'll ask her to take me in for the night because it's so late, and we'll be away first thing in the morning.' A bit angry with me, he was. Poor George," Katie whispered.

"Then you woke up and called and he went in to talk to you. I stood in the doorway and listened and then

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we went out together. He was going to write his folks the next morning, saying where we'd gone and all, and I'd write home at the same time."

Katie sighed, and we sat for a moment in the dark room with nothing but the sounds from the street and the light from the street.

"It was on the ferry it happened," she went on suddenly. "I didn't want anyone to see me, so we stayed on deck. The fog was thick all round the boat, and it was dark on deck. I could hear the foghorns going. . . . There was no one on deck but us. Nasty, it was, and the fog so dense you could hardly see the lights in the cabin. And it was creepy-quiet except for the fog horns. I was shivering with the cold and the excitement. George was sitting on the rail, holding onto a post, and I was standing with my hands in my muff. A pretty round white fur muff it was — my father had given it to me for Christmas."

Katie gave a half-gasping laugh.

"'Now, don't worry about anything, Katie,' George was saying, smiling and trying to get me to smile. 'We'll —' And then there was a terrible crash, and the whole boat shook, and I could hear the sound of splintering, and I was thrown off my feet and hit my head. I tried to get up — people were screaming in the cabin and the boat whistles were going like mad . . . I got up, and George was gone. His suitcase was standing on the deck thrown over, but that was all.

"George was gone, and it came to me he must have gone over the side. I screamed for help, but there was so much screaming — on the other boat, too, the boat that had hit us — and the whistles and the fog —" Katie put her hand vaguely to her head as she might have done that night. "I couldn't make anyone hear me," she said. "And then I don't remember anything except lying on a bench in the cabin with a woman bending over me, and other people around.

"'— nasty crack on the head,' someone said. I could feel the boat moving again, and —

"'I was going to my grandmother's,' I said. It was all I could get out.

"They asked me — 'Do you want to go there now? Where is it?'

"I wanted to tell them about George, and I tried, but not a word could I get out. I thought I was telling them, but I wasn't making a sound. All I could say was, 'I was going to my grandmother's.'

"The woman and the man who was with her took me home, and they brought the suitcase. They'd looked in my bag and found the address, and me all the time trying to tell them about George and not saying a word. They took me home and told Ma it had been an accident, and she put me to bed and wouldn't have any questions asked. And it sounds queer, Maggie, but I fell asleep and slept till morning.

"Then I had to tell them everything. They were sitting at breakfast in the kitchen at the table with the oilcloth cover. And my father got up and got his coat.

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" 'I'll have to tell the Robeys,' he said.

" 'What will you tell them about Katie?' my mother asked, and my father stood still with his coat half on and his face turned away.

" 'Sure, the lad's dead,' my mother said. 'Don't go bringing those good people such terrible news. And must we shame our Katie?'

" 'The Robeys will be looking for the boy. They have to know.'

" 'They'll be finding the body and knowing who it is,' my mother said. And Pop took off his coat and put it away."

Katie reached up and turned on the lamp. Tears must have been washing down her face for a long time.

"Don't think too hard of me, Maggie," she said. "I know I should have told them myself, but I was only eighteen, Maggie, and afraid of the disgrace. Indeed, I meant to tell. But then I got married and moved away . . . When I came back and came over to see you, it was to do that — to tell them. And then she asked if George was with me, and I got afraid all over again."

Katie raised her hands and let them fall . . .

I turned the corner and saw my house, a block away, with all the windows lighted. The doctor's car was standing in front and I knew without any question what had happened. I started to run. The tears came suddenly and spilled over and slid down my face, as I ran up the block.

It wasn't just for Aunt Tina I was crying. It was because she was dead and there was no one left to whom I'd ever been a child. And because I was late with what I had to tell her. And because of what I'd done to Katie, who had lived all her life with the secret. And I was crying for old Mrs. Dallery, who'd brought little Nora — not her child, but Katie's — to see her real grandmother so faithfully. And for Uncle Paul, who was so kind and worked so hard all his life. And for decent, troubled Mr. Dallery . . .

I ran up the steps and Dave opened the door as though he had been watching for me.

"How did it happen?" I cried. "Was she alone?"

Dave helped me into the hall. He had a funny look on his face.

"Alone?" he said. "No, I don't think so."

Even through what was going on inside me it sounded like a queer thing for Dave to say. "You don't think so?" I said. "Don't you *know* whether Aunt Tina was alone or not when it — when it happened?"

"How can anyone know a thing like that?" Dave said, more to himself than to me. Then he said, "You'll have to judge for yourself when you see her expression."

"Dave, what do you mean?"

My husband's arm tightened around me, and he said, "I think — at the very last — George came back."

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*
LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
DQ: *Dorothy Quick in the Easthampton (N. Y.) Star*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**CHARLES B. CHILD**
TITLE:	***The Cockroaches of Baghdad***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Inspector Chafik J. Chafik
LOCALE:	Iraq (formerly called Mesopotamia)
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Political conspiracy, especially in the Middle East, is a ruthless plague; Inspector Chafik proves himself a ruthless surgeon.*

INSPECTOR CHAFIK OF THE IRAQI police climbed the wall and dropped into the grounds of the big estate on the outskirts of Baghdad. He adjusted his polka-dotted tie, brushed his white linen suit, and went over in his mind the instructions that commanded him to attend a high officer of state at midnight.

"A bizarre meeting," the little man said to himself, "but we live in bizarre times. Furthermore, one does not refuse the Minister."

He found a path and walked briskly. A warm breeze caressed him. There was perfume, and he looked down and saw in the starlight the gay carpet of tamarisk blossoms spread by the bending trees. Nearby, he heard the river whisper among the reeds. The look on his thin face softened; he stopped and turned aside from duty to embrace peace.

Something flicked by him with the speed of a serpent's tongue. There was a thud, a vibrating sound. A knife stood quivering in a nearby tree; it had passed within inches of him. Between the columns of the date palms, a shadow moved and vanished. Chafik shrugged and returned the gun he had drawn to the holster under his armpit.

"One might," he said, "find a stationary needle in a haystack, but it would be vain to hunt an active assassin in the gardens of Baghdad."

He plucked the knife from the tree. The blade was beautifully balanced, and when he slipped the knife up his sleeve to carry it, it nestled against his arm cold and deadly, like a viper.

Chafik was more concerned that he

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might be late than that he had been attacked, and he murmured thankfully when he reached the end of the path and saw the house, majestic as a palace. He compared it with his own small home and reproved himself for envy. The bottom rung of the ladder where I stand, he told himself, is convenient to the ground. So comforted, he crossed the wide lawn and tapped on an open French window, as the clocks of the city chimed midnight.

A man's voice challenged him. Chafik said, "Excellency!" and entered a darkened room. Curtains rustled as they were drawn behind him, and he was blinded as the lights came on. He said, "Excellency!" again and performed the full ritual of a salaam, hand to head.

The Minister said, "So you didn't think my note someone's jest."

"I compared it with a specimen of your handwriting, sir."

They were very much alike — the officer of state and the police inspector — small men, deceptively delicate in build. Their faces were swarthy and wide at the cheekbones, and they had sharp, straight noses and full lips.

The Minister was one of those men who are never publicly addressed by their family or given names. He had the pride of Nebuchadnezzar. As he looked over Chafik's head, the Inspector was unreasonably irritated and told himself: He's no taller than I, not really. All Baghdad knows he wears lifts in his shoes. Embarrassed by the thought, he said humbly, "I am here secretly, as commanded, Excellency, and I am mystified that one so unimportant —"

"You are incorruptible, and that makes you important." The Minister charmed his visitor with a smile and went to a desk, which filled one end of the room. Strangely, it did not dwarf him. He sat for a moment with his chin in his hand and then said, "I sent for you unofficially because of the gravity of the situation."

Chafik said, "Yes, there are signs of a *coup d'état* — a grab for power. The unrest resembles the times of Rashid Ali, sir."

His mind wandered back to the dark days of 1940 and 1941 when his young country had been seized by the despot, Rashid Ali al Gailani, who had discarded the Arabic Koran for the German Mein Kampf. Fortunately, the king of Iraq, a five-year-old child, was spirited from the country by his uncle, the regent, and Rashid Ali's attempt to govern without constitutional powers had failed. He fell and passed into oblivion after an attack upon Habbaniya, where the British had a Royal Air Force base and a garrison of Assyrian levies.

Chafik returned to the present and to the Minister's frown. The Minister was saying, "I asked you twice what makes you think there is conspiracy."

"Excellency, please think of police as keepers of a temperamental lion — the people. When they are prodded with an experimental finger, there is an unsheathing of claws, a growl. They sleep again — but they might leap next time."

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"Whose is the finger that prods?"

"I do not inquire. I am a policeman, and political matters belong to security intelligence, the English classification being M.I.5. The chief of this department is Colonel Rassam."

Chafik wished the floor would open under his chair: he had lectured the Minister. In his discomfort, he began to quote from the store of records in his mind, but he did not know he was speaking aloud — an old habit when he was overwrought.

"Rassam," he murmured softly to himself. "Age, sixty-three. Profession, military. Security intelligence chief since 1949. Manner, brusque. Friends, few. Wife died in 1928. No children. He —"

"I have told Rassam you are to work with him," the Minister said shortly.

"Excellency?"

"Your department is criminal investigation. Conspiracy is criminal." The Minister hesitated and then went on, "I have not informed your director. This is between us, over my desk."

He gestured, and his elbow touched a photograph in a heavy silver frame, which fell to the floor. Chafik hastened to pick it up and saw that it was a picture of the very beautiful woman of great family whom the Minister had recently married. The Inspector replaced the photograph awkwardly. He had forgotten the assassin's knife hidden in his sleeve, and it slipped and clattered on the rosewood surface of the desk.

"Did you plan to kill me?" the Minister asked coolly. He made a rapid movement and pointed a small black gun at the Inspector.

Chafik told him about the knife thrown at him in the garden, and the Minister put the gun away. "You kept to yourself what I wrote?" he asked. "You did not confide to anyone?"

"Not even to Abdullah," said the Inspector, naming the sergeant who had been his right-hand man for years.

"And I spoke only to Colonel Rassam," the Minister said. "My note was sent by someone as trustworthy as your Abdullah." He shrugged. "An incident of no import, in any case. The attack was possibly intended for me; we are alike in build."

He stood up, and Chafik was again made aware of lifts.

"I dismiss you," the Minister said. "Communicate with me through Rassam. You are to consult him about everything, even if you plan arrests."

Chafik said, "Yes, Excellency, but I foresee difficulty. We police are civilians, and the military are apt to consider us intruders, particularly in the department of political security."

"He will forget his pride and cooperate. I have so instructed him. I repeat, tell everything to Rassam; do not come to me — never — not unless it is a matter as confidential as your prayers to God." He came from behind the desk and touched the lapel of Chafik's jacket. "It needs a ribbon," he said, smiling. "An order, perhaps the Rafidain."

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The Inspector salaamed twice as he went out through the French windows. When he was on the lawn and in the deep shadow of a plane tree, he stopped and caressed his lapel. He thought of his wife, Leila, and of his small son, Faisal, and how proud they would be if he won a decoration.

He looked back at the room and saw a door open and a woman come in. The silver-framed photograph, he thought, must have been taken by an Englishman — it was an understatement.

Her voice was clear in the still of the night. "You had a visitor?" asked the Minister's wife. "I thought I heard Kadari talking."

"Nobody was here, Nazmi," lied the Minister, and he bowed over her hand.

Chafik went away, not by the path but by a new route, muttering to himself, "Kadari, Mohammed. Age, thirty. Profession, military. Rank, captain. Recently appointed aide-de-camp to Colonel Rassam. Handsome. Popular with women."

He climbed the wall and walked along the boulevard. The domes of the city beckoned; there were chaplets of light on the four towers of the sepulcher of Musa Al-Kadhim.

His car was hidden behind a flowering hedge, and he brushed oleander blossoms off it before he drove away. He tried not to think of the order, to concentrate on the special assignment, but he found he was calculating whether it would be the Rafidain of the Second or Third Class. "Chafik J. Chafik," he reprimanded himself, "there are no orders in Paradise!"

In the rear-view mirror he saw lights, suddenly switched off. A rushing sound, and another car was alongside his. Flame rippled, yellow turning to red. Bullets hammered, a tire was hit, and exploded. He steered to the shoulder of the road and stopped. "God," he announced, "favors me for an unfathomable reason. I am not a good man, yet twice this night I have escaped death. How very extraordinary!"

He got out and leaned against the wrecked car and lighted a cigarette. He wondered if the Minister would dismiss this also as an incident.

In the morning he went to see Colonel Rassam. The colonel was tall and thin, and his lined face was yellowed by malaria. He had a brushed-up white mustache and cold eyes.

This man was responsible for the internal security of the country. He could, in an emergency, direct the military and police to crush rebellion, but his normal duty was to report on political trends, to recommend arrests and deportations. Rassam had given Iraq stability in the unsettled world of the Middle East and was a hero to the people; only the king and cabinet could dismiss him.

"I do not criticize the Minister," he said, "but I consider it premature to bring you police into this."

"Then there is no immediate danger of a *coup d'état?*"

"None. This is merely a test. If they

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who conspire find the state too strong, they will not risk it. And I make the state strong!" Rassam added grimly.

His eyes were no longer cold as he looked from his high window over the city and the land. This man is a fanatic, Chafik thought, and reminded himself to make an addition to the secret record. He asked, "Whom do you suspect?"

"Conspirators stay in the shadows," Rassam said.

Chafik nodded. Political conspiracy, unlike murder, is indirect, and a Brutus does not show his dagger until Caesar has fallen. He said, "Nevertheless, there are people to watch. I have records. I keep them here." He touched his head. "Too dangerous to write them down. Shall we compare notes?"

"It is the Minister's wish," Rassam said indifferently.

The policeman talked, and the intelligence chief listened, at first merely politely, then attentively. "I have underrated you," he said. "You have an excellent spy system."

"My eyes and ears go everywhere, like cockroaches."

"I, too, have cockroaches," Rassam said with a thin smile. "They talk with cultured voices and scavenge at the tables of the great."

There was a light knock on the door, which then opened silently as if it had been ajar. The man who entered had wide shoulders, narrow hips, and wore a uniform cut by a master tailor. His smile had the charm of candlelight and careful conversation. The man said to Colonel Rassam, "Sir, I thought you were alone. Excuse me. I will wait."

Rassam said, "Inspector, this is Captain Kadari of my staff. You know who this is, Kadari."

The captain salaamed to Chafik. "Honored! Your name is so well known." He bowed himself out.

"So," Chafik said. "I meet one of your cockroaches." He looked thoughtfully at his signet ring and said softly, "Kadari of Intelligence — second cousin of Nazmi, wife of —" He heard himself and was confused.

Rassam said severely, "It is not discreet to mention the Minister's wife."

"Your reprimand is just. My tongue is a prattling child."

The Inspector stood and commenced the ceremony of departure; then a thought stopped him, and he asked, "Your cockroach, did he know about my visit to the Minister?"

"I do not gossip."

"A thousand apologies! I only meant that as he is cousin of —"

"Add to your dossier on Kadari that his appointment was made by influence. I did not ask for him, but he is a young man of family."

"Young men of family do not pull strings to join our police force," Chafik said, smiling.

"My department is gilded," Rassam said with the suspicion of a twinkle. He went on, "Be assured if my new cockroach displeases me, I have a heel!"

Chafik completed his departure,

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and when he was in the corridor he hesitated and almost went back; he had not told Colonel Rassam of the two attempts to kill him the previous night. Then he thought: It may not have anything to do with the case. A policeman is never loved, and there are many common criminals who would joyfully pay for the washing of my corpse. He shrugged and left the building.

His headquarters was nearby on Rashid Street, and he walked back. This was the old Turkish quarter, and the overhanging balconies almost met overhead. There were alleyways between the houses — gutters for the monsoon rains — and from one of them ran a man with a dark, blank face, who pointed a gun.

The Inspector did not reach to his shoulder holster — there was no time — nevertheless, the man with the blank face suddenly jackknifed, coughed, and fell, his gun unfired.

Chafik said, without turning his head, "Abdullah, was it necessary to submit this individual to final judgment?"

A big man in khaki uniform stepped from a doorway behind him. His face was carved from mahogany and was almost wholly lacking in expression. "Yes, sir," the police sergeant said. "The individual pointed a dangerous weapon at you. I was angered."

"But now we cannot question him," Chafik complained. He turned the corpse over with his foot. "I do not know this one," he announced.

"No, sir. Possibly an imported gunman. I do regret killing him; it is true a man can be encouraged to talk." Sergeant Abdullah extracted the spent cartridge and slid a live one into the chamber. "I will be more careful next time," he said casually.

The Middle East is the breeding ground of disease, worst of all, the contagion of extreme nationalism. And Chafik, who was aware the plague might be brought to his own country, began to hunt for carriers. He was particularly interested in former members of The Golden Square, the quasi-military organization which had put Rashid Ali into power and had gone underground after the leader's defeat. As always, Chafik was too cautious to commit anything to writing and stored facts in the card index of his mind. Finally he went to Colonel Rassam with his memorized dossiers and a plan.

He said, "I know enough now about certain individuals to make arrests. Only small people, of course, but a policeman's knock in the dawn is like a hammer blow on rotten wood — one never knows what will crawl out."

Rassam smiled. "For myself, I prefer not to strike until I see the snake's head. However, there is merit in your plan. List the raids you plan, and I will inform the Minister."

His Excellency approved, and the Inspector made his first move the next night, surrounding a house where a paid agent had told him he would find certain important documents belonging to the conspirators.

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To keep the raid as secret as possible, Chafik did not brief his men until the last moment. Certain emergency powers gave him authority; no search warrant was necessary, and he hit as unexpectedly as a stratosphere rocket.

His men entered the house, took people from their beds in night clothes, and were disappointed because all were registered as residents. They knew exactly where to look for the documents, went straight to the supposed hiding places, and were again disappointed: nothing was incriminating.

Three days later the Inspector struck again, this time at the Taurus Express, which, with connections from Syria, arrived twice a week. He had information that an exiled leader of The Golden Square would attempt to enter the country on that train.

They found the personal baggage of the wanted man, but he had been warned of the trap and had left the train and fled back across the frontier. Chafik tried twice more; each time he failed, and he sulked in his office. There was a message from the Minister, expressing disapproval, and the Inspector remembered the half-promised order and thought: Now it is reduced to the Third Class. He chewed his nails.

"They even knew His Excellency wanted to see me before I did," he complained. "Surely, too, it was not by chance an assassin lurked when I called on Colonel Rassam."

He was aware of his thoughts shuttling to and fro, weaving facts into fabric. He was positive that leakage was impossible through his own department, and thus was reminded there was only one step between himself and the Minister. He did not like the design his brain was creating, particularly the color, which was somber.

He read a name in the design and said, "All right, let's see if it's true that a cockroach scavenges in its own nest!"

Chafik took his *sidarah* from a peg and adjusted it to flatter his profile. The day was Saturday, and he went to the race track on Muasker Road. He mingled with the crowd, but his interest was not in horses, only in the grandstand where Baghdad society sat.

He looked up from the dust of the public enclosure at a handsome young man who was with a gay party. Reports were confirmed, and he confessed to jealousy when he saw the beautiful woman at the side of Rassam's aide.

"Does His Excellency condone this?" he asked a tout who was trying to sell stable information. "Of course, he never goes anywhere, affairs of state are so exacting. And Kadari is her second cousin — but such a *constant* escort."

He wondered if the Minister was human like other men and confided secrets to his wife, secrets that a trained interrogator, such as Kadari, would know how to extract.

"Conjecture!" Chafik thundered at himself, but he continued to watch.

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All at once he had a strong sensation that he, too, was watched, and he took cover behind the bulky figure of a robed Arab and looked about. There were no familiar faces. Then he noticed the tall, thin man who stood on the platform of the steward's box, with binoculars trained on the grandstand.

Chafik recognized Colonel Rassam.

Rassam lowered his glasses. I am oversuspicious, the Inspector thought, and walked away. Immediately, he had the sensation again and this time could not blame the colonel, who had gone to the paddock.

He lighted a cigarette and decided that a homicide investigation, however sordid, was preferable to the world of intrigue in which he now moved; it was getting on his nerves. Spies spied on spies, and he was no better than the others. Embarrassed, he went and risked half a *dinar* on a horse, to excuse himself for being at the track.

The jockey wore somber silks and the tote paid on a winner.

Leila, his wife, had just said, "Welcome home, husband!" and had knelt to remove his shoes, when the telephone rang. Faisal, his son, came shouting, "Father, my father, it is Abdullah, and surely there is a murdered one!" The little man went to the bedroom, looked regretfully at the connubial couch, and grasped the receiver.

The voice of Sergeant Abdullah intoned. "Item, a corpse —"

"I told you I was not to be bothered with minor items."

"This one is major, sir. Kadari, Mohammed. Found dead in his car on Muasker Road. Shot, sir."

Chafik did not remember leaving the house. He narrowly missed a laden mule on Mansour Avenue and went up Rashid Street, leaving confusion in his wake. It was quieter in the Alwiyah district, and soon he was on the road which led to the race track.

His men were waiting for him at a desolate spot where the dust of the desert was poised in waves like a petrified sea. Kadari's car, a convertible, had plunged off the road and nosed into a dune, which had hidden it from the home-going crowds. The stalled engine was cold.

Chafik looked at the body and said, "This one ceases to be a suspect."

The bullet had come from a rifle, and they had found the place where the sniper had waited.

"Range, seventy yards," Sergeant Abdullah said. "Death, immediate."

"Have you found out what time he left the race track?"

"Yes, sir. The police saw him depart before the last race."

"I left before the fourth race," Chafik said, "and this road was as empty as one followed by a man without sons. Only the ruined leave a track before the last race is run."

A military car lurched through the sand, and the Inspector went to meet Colonel Rassam, who brushed him aside without speaking. Rassam's mus-

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tache quivered as he saluted his murdered aide. "Well?" he demanded, turning to Chafik.

The Inspector briefed him. "A trap," he suggested. "Kadari was enticed away, and —"

"He was not enticed," Rassam said. "He left on my orders."

"Eh?"

"You watched him with the Minister's wife as I watched him. I, too, have had reports, and —" The colonel's face darkened. "Such a public exhibition might have reflected upon my department," he finished harshly.

"Yes?" Chafik waited with a policeman's patience.

"I telephoned the grandstand and told him to leave before the last race and go to my office. I intended to reprimand him."

"Why do you tell me this, Colonel?"

"Because others heard me make my call from the steward's box on an open telephone. They would have told you."

"When did you make the call?"

"Following the fourth race."

"There are eight races," Chafik said in a hollow voice. "Kadari gets the call after the fourth and leaves after the seventh. Three races, and each one with preliminaries, takes roughly half an hour. That adds up to one and a half hours — time to arrange an ambush."

He heard himself and was embarrassed, and when he saw Rassam staring, he smiled nervously. "I mean," he said, "that a steward's box is a crowded place. People come and go. So many could have overheard what you said to Kadari. That would provide so many alibis," the Inspector added absently.

"Alibis?"

"I should have said 'suspects.' So many could have set the ambush."

The colonel looked at him for a long minute; then he turned, saluted his dead again, and went away.

"My tongue gets looser every day," Inspector Chafik confessed to Sergeant Abdullah.

The Minister's wife was stricken, and the Minister was angry. Blame fell on the policeman, and he shrugged and fingered his lapel, thinking: Now not even the Rafidain of the Third Class. There were many trails, but no real clues. He explored patiently and was agreeably surprised when he got a lead.

He relayed the information to the Minister in the usual way, through Rassam, and then surrounded a rooming house in the Bab-el-Sheik district, where he was told a man was in hiding.

The man was gone — it was the old story — but they found a rifle fitted with a telescopic sight, and the ballistics experts said it was the weapon. Chafik traced it to the armory at Hinadi Camp. There the trail ended.

"A broken thread," Chafik said. "I must stop my loom until I find another loose end, then I can knot them and go on weaving. Alas! I am pockets-down for threads — surely God teaches me how the poor live!"

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He heard the prayer callers announcing *el Asr*, the midafternoon prayer, from the mosques of Baghdad. He took his rolled mat and went out to the public garden and asked for help. He rose refreshed and confident.

The Inspector's mail the next morning included a small package addressed for personal attention. He pushed it with a forefinger and sent it to the laboratory, unopened.

They told him the bomb enclosed was designed to explode on the untying of the string. Fortunately the mechanism was at fault, and nothing would have happened if he had been unwise enough to open the package.

Chafik knew his habits had been studied; he was a man who always untied knots and saved string. He admitted he was frightened. There had been four attempts at his life. Each had failed, yet the one try on Kadari had given the young man gravestones for his head and feet. "Do I look like a man granted nine lives?" the Inspector demanded of his assistant who had just entered the room. He licked his hand and with a feline gesture soothed a sandfly bite on the nape of his neck.

Sergeant Abdullah said with unexpected warmth, "May you be granted ten thousand lives!" The big man closed his mouth, then said with formality, "An individual to see you, sir. An informer."

"Kindly open a window and bring him in."

The informer was a thin man with a thin voice, and he made his confidence with mouth close to the Inspector's ear. Chafik paid him, and when he had gone, said to Abdullah, "See that he is arrested within decent limits of this building. I lack funds to purchase his loyalty." He added, "Furthermore, the other people might cut his throat."

The information, he was sure, was genuine; it had the right sour taste. The conspirators had an armory in the town of Falujah, near Baghdad, and the weapons would be used to arm malcontents when there was a rising. The Inspector thought: This is the greatest discovery yet. Rassam must share the responsibility of the raid. If I fail — He took his *sidarah*, started from the office, then had another thought, turned back, and locked the door.

He sat at his desk and smoked steadily through a long day; the pyramid of butts in his ashtray was a feat of engineering. Step by step he traced his failures and then reined in his mind, too eager to take hurdles. Chafik saw ditches behind easy jumps.

Always he came back to the faulty bomb and remembered the other abortive attempts, the thrown knife, the machine gun, the gunman. Near midnight he was in turmoil and interlaced his fingers so that the signet ring bruised him. He sweated, and it was a cool night. He cried out, "Chafik J. Chafik! Let reason enter this emotional conflict like a fireman's hose into a burning building!"

All at once he was calm and thought

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of Kadari, how Kadari had been skillfully murdered, how Chafik J. Chafik had survived.

He told the still-room, "It is obvious they never really wanted to kill me. They keep me alive for a purpose."

The Inspector brought loose ends together and tied a knot. His thoughts began to revolve. He got up and went to the window and looked over the rooftops of sleeping Baghdad. "God the Merciful!" he exclaimed. "What a monstrosity — a spider caught in its own web!"

In the morning he called the ministry on the scrambler, asked for the Minister, said, "Over!" and depressed the button on the base of the instrument.

His Excellency was angered. "You should not call me, not even on the secret telephone! You disappoint me, Chafik. Kadari died and —"

Chafik bowed to the storm and said, "His death will be avenged, sir."

"How?" asked the Minister.

"Excellency, when we unmask the conspirators it will be simple to trace the hireling who killed Kadari, and humbly I suggest my latest report will make naked many faces."

"What report?" demanded the Minister. "What report, eh?"

"Sir," Chafik said. "I refer of course to the report I made yesterday to Colonel Rassam concerning the cache of arms at the town of Falujah."

"Rassam told me nothing!"

Perspiration wilted Chafik's collar, and he loosened his tie. "I do not understand," he said in a bewildered voice. "Possibly the colonel wishes to confirm my information before he transmits it to you. However, I do confess —" The little man stammered.

"Speak up!" said the Minister.

"Excellency, I confess I am unhappy about my association with Rassam. That is why I risk your wrath with this telephone call. So many things go wrong when I send you details of my plans through an intermediary. Of course I am not suggesting —"

"What plans have you made about Falujah and this secret arsenal?"

"Excellency, it is a matter of such importance I am using men from Basra and Mosul, not the Baghdad police. I planned to strike tomorrow."

"Then do so!"

"But, Excellency, Colonel Rassam will be angry. He —"

"Act without Rassam! I will say nothing to him about your call. I am mystified about his silence; he can explain that later. So raid! If you fail, I expect your resignation on my desk."

Inspector Chafik remembered the desk. He said, "Yes, Excellency."

The scrambler made barnyard sounds as the Minister hung up.

Falujah was on the Euphrates, the greatest of the rivers of Iraq. The river was crossed by a single-track bridge, always guarded, this time by Chafik's men. He enclosed the rest of the small town with police debarked from trucks, and no one knew the purpose of the raid until Falujah was surrounded.

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They went up the rutted main street and invaded a café where men sprawled on green-painted benches, enjoying the cool of the evening. They broke into ancient vaults and found nothing except splintered crates and a few weapons dropped in confusion.

The tracks of trucks were will-o'-the-wisps in the desert sands. Nobody knew anything, and Inspector Chafik inhaled the smoke of his cigarette and said in precise English, "With salaams to Oscar Wilde, who first said it, this is the precise psychological moment when to say nothing —"

"Sir, it is perdition!" exclaimed Sergeant Abdullah, and put an arm like an oak-tree bough around the slight shoulders of the Inspector.

Chafik patted the big man's cheek. "My friend, let us look forward with hope." He produced a sealed envelope and placed it in the sergeant's hand. "Take this to Colonel Rassam," he said. "Swiftly, my Abdullah!"

"Sir!"

"There are knots in your windpipe; you strangle yourself with an unasked question. Be patient, and all will be made clear. I go now to report failure."

Chafik went to his car, dismissed the driver, and plunged into the bowl of light on the horizon which was Baghdad.

He turned left on the outskirts of the city, went by the tomb of Queen Zobeide, legendary figure of the Arabian Nights, and finally halted the car on the edge of a wide boulevard. He walked until he came to a wall, climbed it, and dropped into the grounds of the Minister's estate.

The path was carpeted with tamarisk blossoms, and he heard the river gurgling among the reeds, but found no peace. A warm breeze caressed him, and he thought its breath was foul.

He reached the great house and saw there was a light in the room. He climbed the terrace and tapped lightly on the open French window, then went in and salaamed to the man who rose in surprise from his great desk.

"Excellency!" said Chafik, and completed the ritual.

The Minister had a lock of hair which fell over his forehead, and he brushed it back and said, "I commanded you never to come to me."

"Not unless the matter was as confidential as my prayers to God."

"I remember what I said," answered the Minister, impatiently. He had the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and looked over Chafik's head.

The Inspector rose tiptoe to match the height of the lifts worn by His Excellency. "I failed at Falujah," he said. "They knew about the raid before I got there. Always the same story."

"There is no excuse for failure!"

"I know! I know!" Chafik was humble, yet eager. He took a document from his pocket and put it on the rosewood mirror of the Minister's desk. "A report," he said. "Honor me by reading it, Excellency."

The Minister took the official blue

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folios and read aloud, "Most Secret and Confidential. Report on Colonel Rassam." He raised his head and looked at Chafik and then went on reading. "No!" he said finally. "I cannot believe this! You trace every failure back to the information you gave Rassam to transmit to me? You suggest that he is in league with the conspirators?"

"I thought that," Chafik said softly, "until the last failure."

He snatched the report from the Minister's hand and tore it up. "You see," he went on in the same quiet voice, "the information I gave you over the telephone about the cache of arms at Falujah was between us and us only. I lied to you, Excellency. Rassam did not transmit the facts to you because I did not give them to him. No whipping boy for you this time. Only one person could have warned the conspirators — you, Excellency."

Chafik continued: "Rassam is the rock on which the state stands. He is the man you dare not assassinate. The country would rise to seek his murderer. But disgrace him, let the eagle be seen decked in cuckoo feathers, and then —"

"You are quite mad."

"So," Chafik went on, "you looked for a simple policeman and promised him decorations and gave him a free hand, with the proviso that everything he found out, or planned, went to you through the channel of Rassam. You made fake attempts on my life to titillate my ego and to encourage me to suspect Rassam. They were overdone, Excellency, and led me to ask myself *why* I was not to be killed. There was only one answer. You expected me to present the report I have just torn up, and you would have gone to the cabinet with it and had the man you fear removed. Your own creature, whoever he is, would have filled the key post; then you would have been free to complete your plans for the *coup d'état*, your own grab for power."

"What madness you talk!" said the Minister.

"A foolish man got in your way, one Kadari," continued the Inspector. "He was harmless, but your plot to use me to destroy Rassam was endangered because I suspected Kadari instead of suspecting the colonel. So you had him removed."

"He was too attentive to my wife!"

Chafik shook his head. "You never loved Nazmi. A man like you loves nobody. Confess to God you really married into your wife's great family to favor your ambition."

The Minister made a sudden movement, and a small black gun showed in his hand. "I can kill you," he said. "I can say you threatened me after I dismissed you for the Falujah failure. Who would doubt me?"

"Rassam," Chafik told him. "I sent him a full report before I came here."

The Minister lowered the gun and said in a wheedling voice, "Deny it. Rewrite the report you tore up. I can make you my chief of police."

"We started with the Rafidain, pos-

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sibly of the Second Class; we end with nothing. That's what happens when you get the reputation of being incorruptible."

Chafik looked into the eye of the gun and then at the very little man hunched behind the big desk. He knew compassion and said, "Oh, Excellency, what a great man you might have been! How tragic your ambition! With what surety, step by step, you have ascended into hell!"

Chafik turned his back and walked slowly to the door. He half expected a bullet in his back and hoped it would find his spine and so numb pain. No bullet came. He closed the door and leaned against the wall and tried to light a cigarette; his hand shook too much.

He closed his eyes and prayed.

Behind the door, ambition ended with a revolver shot.

The Inspector ignored the startled servants who came running. He heard the sound of that shot go ringing over Baghdad and over Iraq, as water makes rings when a stone is thrown into a still pool. There would be echoes and a scuttling of the little men and the gunmen who had taken His Excellency's pay. Some would escape; some would be taken.

Chafik squared his shoulders and went to meet Colonel Rassam, whose car had just roared up the drive.

NEXT MONTH . . .

12 stories, including:

Cornell Woolrich's ONE NIGHT TO BE DEAD SURE OF

Mabel Seeley's LET RUN, OR CATCH?

Stuart Palmer's HILDEGARDE AND THE SPANISH CAVALIER

Anthony Gilbert's ONCE IS ONCE TOO MANY

Michael Innes's THE GHOST OF A GHOST

and another $250 contest story by Clayton Rawson

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ANTHONY BOUCHER**

TITLE: ***Murder Was Their Business***

TYPE: Off-Trail Crime Story

CHARACTERS: Alonzo Foss and Hagar Dix

LOCALE: Pasadena, California

COMMENTS: *What happens when a retired hangman, aged 63, marries a passionately curious crime-writer, aged 32?*

IT'S HARD TO TELL WHERE TO START this story. I could start it back in Iowa with the Wythe murder, if a common death by shooting is interesting enough. I could start it with Hagar and the way her stubby fingers twitched when she thought of a killer. Or I could start it much further on, with the Pasadena police when they discovered that you can cut the head off a corpse but you can't necessarily fit it back on.

But I think it's best to start in with Alonzo. It all revolves around Alonzo. Hagar and Willis and me . . . the whole picture would never have come into focus if it hadn't been for Alonzo and his profession.

They say you can get used to anything. Aunt Martha used to say, "You can get used to hanging if you hang long enough." I wouldn't know about that, though Willis might have. But I do know you can get used to a hangman.

At first there wasn't any telling Alonzo from the other retired Iowans playing checkers and horseshoes in the Arroyo. He chewed cigars like the rest of them; he had the same paunch and the same baldness. He played a fair game of checkers and a better than average game of horseshoes. And like the others, on a hot day he took off his coat and sat around in a shirt with a collar and tie and suspenders, which was to indicate that even though he was a voluntary exile from Iowa he still hadn't given in to California.

I used to wear a tie myself when I

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went down to the Arroyo. I fitted in better that way. Maybe it seems a funny place for me to want to fit in — a bunch of men a generation ahead of me living out their retired lives with huffs and ringers.

But to retire you have to have money. That's sort of in the nature of things. And that makes a city like Pasadena, where being retired is a major occupation, a logical place for a man like me. Because when you have money you always want it to be a little more, and a gilt-edged proposition for doubling it in six months looks mighty attractive.

That's how I met Alonzo — on what you might call a scouting expedition down to the checker tables. I was soothing down a retired banker from Waterloo, explaining to him how a flock of new government regulations was hampering the quick return he had expected, when I first heard Alonzo.

"It's a shame," he was saying, loud and sort of petulant, "it's a shame and a disgrace to the nation. Only eleven states left, unless you count Utah and you can't hardly do that. Only eleven states still following the 'American Way.'

I listened while I kept telling my banker how right he was.

"California held out a long time," Alonzo went on, "but what've you got now? Murder, that's what you've got; plain, cold-blooded, legal murder. What does the Constitution say? I'll tell you what the Constitution says. The Constitution says . . ." He paused and held his breath. He let it out slowly and then said with a pause between every pair of words: "*Cruel and unusual punishments shall not be inflicted.* That's what the Constitution says."

Alonzo made pretty much of a speech of it. Even my banker began listening and pretty soon there was a little crowd around him. He had all the facts: Twenty-two states where they fry you in the chair, eight where they use the lethal gas chamber, six (and this seemed to hurt Alonzo the worst) where they don't even kill you at all.

I kind of liked Utah. There they give you a choice. You can select whether you want to get shot or hanged. And all the time that law's been in force, nobody's picked hanging yet.

That really got Alonzo. "What kind of murderers is that?" he argued. "Afraid to die the good old American Way? And what kind of legislators pass laws like that?"

Somebody said something about Communists and somebody else said the only trouble with them was hanging'd be too good for them and the conversation began to get away from Alonzo. It's always a good time to hit a man, just when the conversation's getting away from him; so I slipped up next to Alonzo and listened to him.

Finally I said, "Just what makes you so hot about this, Mr. Foss?" (We'd exchanged names by then.) "Sounds like maybe you had some kind of personal angle on it."

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"Well," Alonzo said, "I guess for me it is kind of talking shop, like. You see, son . . . Well, there's no use being modest about it. I was the best darned hangman the state of Iowa ever had."

You know how you get ideas. You think of a hangman as gaunt and grisly, like the Thing that comes for Mr. Punch. And you sit in the hot Pasadena sunlight and you look at this plump little man with the white collar on the blue shirt and the sweat stains under the armpits and he grins at you and says he's a retired hangman.

You think a hangman must be grisly in his mind too, like a war criminal or a mass murderer. And you sit and listen to him and the voice goes on flat and colorless and it's just another retired businessman talking shop and his big executions have about as much thrill to them as a retired dentist's account of his trickiest impacted wisdom tooth.

It was a job and he worked at it. He took a certain pride in it; he was a craftsman. He wasn't just a hangman; he was the best darned hangman in Iowa history. But the fact that he'd killed people . . . .

"Everybody kills a murderer," Alonzo said. "You elect the attorney that convicts him and the judge that sentences him. You pay for the detectives that track him down and the rope that hangs him. Why, son, I haven't killed a man any more than you have."

I smiled at that one. It was certainly one way to put it.

But it wasn't the way Hagar looked at it.

I met Hagar at a dinner party. The dinner was intended as another scouting expedition; but I didn't think about that much after I sat down next to Hagar.

Maybe you've read some of her stuff. Hagar Dix is the full name. Factual murder stories — not the true-detective kind of stuff, but pretty subtle probings into murderers and what makes them tick. I'd read some and liked them — I've got a certain interest in murder. And I guess I'd thought of her as one of these admirable research workers — the women who think in straight lines and wear their clothes the same way.

I was wrong. Hagar had straight lines strictly in the right places only. She had a face that should've been ugly, and black eyes looked out at you and you didn't see the face. You didn't see much else around you and you didn't taste your food; and you tried to decide whether you hated this woman or . . . Well, or not. And you could underline that *not*.

I don't talk much about the Wythe case. My connection with the Wythes wasn't one of my more triumphant episodes. Herman got some ideas about that Trans-Con bond issue that were as unfair and unjustified as they were accurate; and I kind of preferred to forget the whole episode.

But this night I wanted to make a pitch with Hagar; and murder being her business, you might say, I sort of

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offhand said I had known a convicted murderer.

It was then I first noticed her hands. Her legs were long, her neck was high and slim; but her hands were the shortest and stubbiest I've ever seen. The three segments of her fingers added up to the length of the first two on most hands. They were strong, those stubs; and now the brief forefingers made sharp staccato stabs at the table cloth, while the little-fingers arched and twitched.

"You've known . . . a murderer?" It was a deeper voice than she had used before, and yet it had the tone of a bobbysoxer addressing Frankie's valet.

But the fact that I had exchanged maybe twenty sentences with Willis Wythe wasn't quite enough to keep her keyed up for long. Her fingers knocked off and rested, and she said, "I've never known a murderer. With all my work. Oh, I've talked to them through jail bars, I've seen them in court. I've met men who were acquitted . . . but always justly, I'm sure. If only once . . ." She turned the eyes on me and I almost said something I'd've been sorry for.

But the girl on my other side wanted the salt and when I turned back Hagar asked me if I'd been to the Community Theater lately.

It was a few hours and a lot of drinks later that I was standing with Hagar on the balcony overlooking the Arroyo.

The white sand in the moonlight looked like bleached bones and I said so — which is not the sort of remark I usually make to girls on balconies, but there is no accounting for what happens to a man with Hagar.

One stubby finger twitched slightly. "Death . . ." Hagar said. "Death is the only power . . ." Then she faced me abruptly and announced, "I'm a fake."

I said, "So?" which seemed as plausible an answer as any.

"I write books. I pretend to try to explain why people commit murders. But I know that. You know that. It's only being human to know that. What I don't know is the other thing. Why *don't* people commit murders? Why are there so few? What is there about killers that makes them . . . I don't know . . . *free* from whatever hampers all the rest of us?"

It was looking down at the Arroyo that gave me the idea. "I know a killer," I said slowly. "He's killed forty-nine men. You can meet him tomorrow."

The balcony rail throbbed under Hagar's twitching tattoo.

You didn't regularly see anything like Hagar around the checker tables. But her presence didn't seem to bother Alonzo any. Things didn't bother him much.

I'd got to know him pretty well the past few weeks. We kind of liked each other, I guess. And I knew most of his stories and I couldn't share Hagar's excitement when he told about how the Mad Butcher of Clover Hill started singing a hymn just before the

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trap sprang, or how Mrs. Leroux (whose baby farm was a sort of after-the-fact method of birth control) went stark raving mad on the trap.

It was hard to get excited about them anyway, the drab matter-of-fact way he told them. But Hagar sat there with her black eyes fixed on him, and the checkerboard next to us jumped with the thumps of her fingers.

"But I did have one . . . I guess you might call it a failure," Alonzo confessed. "Young Willis Wythe . . . Danged trap went down one inch and then stuck. Left him standing there with no more damage than you'd suffer from a tight collar. So they take him off. I go to work and oil the trap and test it. Works fine. They put him back on and what do you know? Danged trap sticks again. Three times it happens — never did find out why."

"I remember," Hagar said softly. "The Governor commuted his sentence . . . then later pardoned him because the women's organizations made such a to-do."

"He was guilty," I said.

Hagar looked at me hastily as though she had forgotten I was there. "That's right . . . you knew the Wythes." Then back to Alonzo, "And that was your one failure, Mr. Foss?"

"Dang it," said Alonzo. "It was fine for him — pardoned and everything. But somehow I never have felt quite right about that."

He sounded a little guilty, like a doctor who had lost a prize patient from causes he couldn't explain.

It was just then that my retired banker tapped me on the shoulder and I withdrew.

I didn't see either Alonzo or Hagar again for a year. My banker had been talking to his lawyer and to some stuffed shirt calling himself an Investment Counsellor. I didn't much care for the short-sighted ideas they'd been planting in his mind, and it looked like a good notion to stay away from Pasadena for a while.

So it was in a Nebraska paper that I read about the marriage.

"Hagar Dix, 32," it said, "noted criminologist, and Alonzo Foss, 63, retired professional man."

I spoke out loud in the hotel lobby. "This," I said, "I gotta see."

I wasn't taking any chances on meeting my banker. I went to Alonzo's home. It was on North Orange Grove, which isn't South Orange Grove but is still a pretty comfortable neighborhood. The house looked like it'd been done over recently, and I guessed Hagar was sinking her criminological income into it.

They were glad to see me. There was a lot of talk about how I brought them together and wasn't it fate and stuff. The talk was more on Alonzo's level than on Hagar's.

Alonzo had changed. I thought in my mind that he looked haggard and then I thought what a lousy pun that was and then I thought pun, hell! It's the exact truth. I never did understand just how the marriage was arranged. Hagar never talked about it,

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and I doubt if Alonzo understood himself. How much does a male spider understand?

Hagar? She looked a little . . . I don't know . . . richer maybe. Fuller. She could listen to Alonzo now and her fingers stayed still. I couldn't figure if that was good or bad.

I learned after Alonzo went to bed. "I'm a man that needs his eight hours," he said, "and I've got a championship horseshoe match on in the morning."

Hagar and I looked at each other while his footsteps echoed off.

I said, "Well? Did it work?"

Hagar said, "What do you think?"

I said, "I think it did at first and now it doesn't. Change your ideas about killing?"

"No. Just my ideas about Alonzo."

I said, "Because he isn't a killer after all, is he? He's just a poor old guy whose job happened to involve death. And maybe if you met Jack the Ripper his shop talk wouldn't be so hot either."

Hagar said nothing.

I stood up for the next speech, I said, "Maybe you've been wrong all down the line. Maybe you ought to give a try to —"

She didn't let me finish. She said, "I met a man. Oh, not quite by chance. Let's say by premeditated coincidence . . ." Her fingers twitched on their imaginary drum. "You'll stay for the weekend, of course?"

"I could, I guess. Do you think I'd find it . . . rewarding?"

"I'm sure you would. This man is coming. I want you . . . but then you know him already, don't you?"

"Who is he?"

"Alonzo's one failure . . . Willis Wythe."

I remembered Willis Wythe as a tow-headed kid who was sore at his uncle — pretty much like any other kid you ever knew, except Uncle doesn't usually wind up with three bullets from the kid's target pistol. (The Governor decided it was all purely circumstantial evidence when the pressure was turned on him for the pardon.)

I wouldn't have known this hard dark man with the lined face and the edgy bitter voice. But I liked him, and when he talked about the things he had done in the past years (I guess he was what the Sunday supplements call an Adventurer) I even began to think of angles where maybe we might work together.

We got through Friday night somehow, but even then I was glad I wasn't Willis. There wasn't a moment in the evening when either Alonzo or Hagar wasn't looking at him, and they were looks that there aren't words for in any books I know.

What Hagar's meant you can figure by now. Here is a man who has murdered and escaped. He knows. And he isn't sixty-three with a pot-belly.

Alonzo's was harder to define. It was a kind of worry. It was like a writer staring at a paragraph that doesn't sound right and wondering how the hell to revise.

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Willis didn't understand that look. For once there wasn't a word said about Alonzo's former profession; and Willis probably hadn't even seen him on the one occasion their paths had crossed before. For Willis this was just a weekend with an interesting woman and a dull husband, and he was an Adventurer.

I had a little trouble getting to sleep that night. That's how I heard the slippered footsteps and the bedroom doors.

Even Alonzo must have noticed the difference in Hagar the next morning. This richness, fullness that I was talking about — it was as if it were coming to its final intensity.

I had one chance to speak to Hagar alone. I said, "So now you think you know?" and my mouth twisted as I said it.

Hagar said, "Not yet. Not *quite* yet . . ." and Willis came in and we talked about old acquaintances back in Iowa.

That was Saturday, and Saturday night Willis and Hagar went dancing at the Hotel Green.

Alonzo said, "I'm not much of a hand at dancing. Good for her to go out with somebody nearer her own age." And he meant it, the poor guy, and I sat there and played checkers with him and wondered why I was sticking around.

I was just figuring that it was, in a way, only a standard method of mine in my other line — if things look headed for a crack-up, stick around; there's no telling what a smart man may pick up out of the wreck — when Alonzo looked up from the checkerboard and said, "It's Willis that's come between Hagar and me."

I didn't say anything about slippers and doors. Instead I laughed and said, "They've only just met. You must think he's a pretty fast worker."

"It isn't that." He let that denial ride flat for three moves. Then he added, "Failure. You see, Hagar . . . I'm no kind of a man to be married to her. You know that, son. But she thought I was . . . I don't know . . . kind of powerful, I guess, on account of what I'd . . . But you see, I wasn't, because . . ."

It was the first time I'd ever heard Alonzo talk about anything emotional, and he couldn't make it. His phrases wouldn't come straight. He just said "Willis" a couple more times, and once he said, "One hundred per cent."

After the game he sat there until his regular bedtime, just staring at the brand-new radio-phonograph. I couldn't think why until after he had gone to bed. Then I remembered. I'd been around when it was delivered the day before. It came in a hell of a big packing case, all bound round with good strong rope.

I waited for Willis in his bedroom. He didn't like it when he came in and found me there. We could both hear Hagar moving around in the next room. Her fingers drummed on the objects she passed.

Willis said, "Bedroom vigils yet? What gives?"

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I said, "Do you know who your host is?"

"I hear he tosses a mean horseshoe."

So I told him. "And he's worried," I added. "You're the . . . well, the blot on an otherwise stainless life, you might say. It's kind of a reproach to Alonzo Foss that you're walking around here alive."

His lean face was tauter than ever. "I'm getting out of here," he said. We were both silent, and we listened to Hagar's fingers. His lips softened and he added, "Tomorrow."

"It isn't worth it," I said. "Staying, I mean. I only warned you because . . . hell, I feel I owe you something."

He was hard again. "Owe me what?"

"I was out of the State at the time of your trial. I wasn't even reading newspapers. But I maybe could've cleared you and I didn't. You see, I know Alonzo Foss's record *is* clear. He didn't need to hang you — you were innocent."

He loomed over me. "You could have cleared me? And you didn't?" His heavy fist was balled.

"We're even," I said. "I'm giving you your life now. Get out . . . before Alonzo's ideas go too far."

His voice was getting high and sharp. "How could you have cleared me? Why didn't you?"

I started to tell him how and why. It was then he jumped me. His taut face twisted into curious shapes. His hard lips mouthed ugly words, rising higher and higher.

When I left the silent room, Hagar was waiting for me in the hall. She was in a nightgown that looked as if she'd saved it for a bridal night. She put her black eyes on me and said, "I heard a little of it . . . What happened?"

I told her, just the way I've told it above.

I never saw a face do what hers did then. It went blank. Dead blank. Even the eyes . . . their blackness seemed to go away. There was nothing on the face, nothing at all.

And that emptiness was the most terrible thing I have ever seen.

Alonzo was the first one up the next morning. He was on his way to the horseshoes by the time I got down to breakfast. I was on my third cup of coffee and the second section of the *Times* when Hagar came in.

She said, "Have you seen that rope around anywhere?"

"What rope?"

"From the packing case. I thought I'd use it to tie up a parcel."

"No, I haven't seen it."

She took the first section of the *Times* with her coffee. She was wonderfully relaxed this morning — calm literally to her fingertips. It was a domestic sort of scene — coffee and newspapers and silence. I liked it.

It was an hour before I began wondering about Willis. Hagar seemed unperturbed when I mentioned him. I wasn't really perturbed myself until I got no answer to my knock and walked on into his room.

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First it was the smell. The day was building to a scorcher and the blood permeated the air. A window was open, and word of the blood had gotten about among the neighborhood's flies.

I took some fast gulps out the open window before I went near the bed. I don't know why I touched him. I didn't have to know he felt cold on that hot day. Most men do when their heads are missing.

Lieutenant Kurman had laryngitis. His voice never rose above a whisper all the time he questioned us.

They were shrewd, economical questions. It wasn't long before he had a pretty thorough diagram of the three of us and our relations to that headless corpse upstairs. It wasn't long before he had the cleaver, too. It had been neatly washed, but he spotted the minute stains and knew what the laboratory analysis would do with them.

"You're intelligent people," Lieutenant Kurman whispered. "I can talk to you."

Alonzo looked at him with vacant old eyes. Hagar was still cool and poised, still in her casual how-tragic-but-after-all-we-barely-knew-the-man attitude.

"You're something of a criminologist yourself, Mrs. Foss," he whispered on. "And death's no stranger to you, Mr. Foss." He turned to me as though wondering how to continue the parallel.

"I've been around," I said.

"Exactly," he breathed. "So you all understand that the key to an understanding of this crime lies in the removal of the head. The commonest reason — preventing identification — can hardly apply here; the man's fingerprints are on file in Iowa. There'd be no hope of, let us say, ringing in a substitute body if he himself wished to disappear."

Hagar observed coolly, "Clearly, Lieutenant, you are trying to erect logic on an illogical basis. What can you 'deduce' from the act of a wandering madman?"

The Lieutenant shrugged. "I do not doubt," he murmured, "that we will be hearing about that 'wandering madman' from the defense. But in the meantime — with all deference to your knowledge of crime, Mrs. Foss — let us be honest with each other. In all likelihood, we must assume —"

It was just then that the Sergeant came in with something wrapped in bloody newspapers. "Found it just west of here, Lieutenant. Halfway down the slope of the Arroyo. Also found this." His other hand held a length of rope, such as comes around packing cases.

"You will excuse me," said the Lieutenant's confidential voice. He rose, took the package from the Sergeant, and hastened upstairs.

The Sergeant stood there in the doorway, looking from the rope in his hands to Alonzo and back again. Conversation did not flourish under the circumstances.

When the Lieutenant returned, his

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voice came as near as possible to breaking the whispered monotony of his speech. It all but rose to excitement as he announced, "I have made a most interesting discovery. This will fascinate you as a student of murder, Mrs. Foss." He paused. I've never seen a man in authority yet that didn't have a touch of ham. He held the pause, and finally said, "I have discovered that the head and the body *don't fit!*"

I jumped. Hagar rose slowly to her feet. Alonzo stared at the rope in the Sergeant's hands.

"Does this mean, Lieutenant," said Hagar, "that there is some fraud after all, some confusion?"

"No fraud, Mrs. Foss." The whisper was eager. "A little confusion, yes. But I'm sure you can think it through." He went on slowly, "They don't fit. Because there is only a body, and a head. How could they fit?"

I hated the man. He was enjoying this scene. But Hagar went calmly on, "Don't they usually? Heads and bodies? Isn't it the accepted thing?"

"Not quite. You see, Mrs. Foss, there should be a neck to connect them."

He let that one sink in. I tried to think fast. The neck was missing. The cleaver had been used twice. The Sergeant began drawing the rope through his fingers.

"Why?" came the whispered question. "The neck has been removed. Perhaps chopped in smaller pieces and . . . disposed of. But why? Surely there is one reason — because the neck would betray the murderer. Because something about that neck would prove the method of killing and point a directly accusing finger. Because . . ." Lieutenant Kurman held his pause again. Then he whirled, carried away by his own words, and pointed a directly accusing finger. "Because the neck would prove that the corpse *was hanged!*"

On the last words his voice for one instant reached normal volume. The effect was deafening.

Alonzo rose slowly to his feet. He still looked past the directly accusing finger at the rope. His voice was hardly louder than the Lieutenant's as he said, "One hundred per cent . . ."

He said nothing else as they took him away.

We were alone in the house now, Hagar and I. The stretcher had gone, and so had the wagon. The lawyer had been telephoned, the plans had been laid for the insanity defense. Suddenly there was nothing but an empty hot day ahead.

It was the first time that we had ever been completely alone. I looked at Hagar as though I had never seen her before. As indeed I hadn't. Not this Hagar. Not this ripe, complete, fulfilled woman, with serene black eyes and passive fingers.

I said, "You did it all, you know."

Hagar bowed her head gracefully. She said, "I know. It was cruel to bring them together. To make Alonzo face what he called his 'failure.' I

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might have foreseen . . . But I had to *know*."

"And now you know?"

"More than you can dream."

"Not more than I can guess."

"Guessing is nothing. *Nothing*."

"I said you did it. That's more than guessing."

She looked at me without expression. "Am I to blame? Any more than you are to blame for introducing me to Alonzo? Every meeting starts ripples — some place those ripples intersect at murder. This was only more . . . direct than usual."

"I said you *did* it. Not caused it."

She said nothing, but her eyes became interested. Nothing more than that, just interested.

"The Lieutenant's a glib ham. His reasoning doesn't hold water for a second. Remove the neck to destroy the evidence of hanging? Nonsense. All removing the neck does is *call attention to the neck*. Bring to mind the idea of murder by the neck. Suggest hanging, in fact.

"And the mere fact of hanging would be no direct personal proof. Sure, it would point to Alonzo. But only as a lead, not as proof. There'd be no sense to the neck gimmick unless it removed *proof*, unless the neck positively had to be destroyed because the neck itself was irrefutable proof of the killer's identity."

"How?" asked Hagar calmly. "It's next to impossible to get fingerprints from flesh."

"You're on the track," I said. "He was strangled, wasn't he? That's why the neck had to be destroyed. Because you can't get prints, but you can get the size and shape of the fingers. And *yours are unique*."

Hagar glanced down at her incredibly blunt and stubby hands, still restful and twitchless. "You're a clever man," she said. "But there's no point in making a Thing of it, is there? Poor Alonzo is obviously mad. I hadn't counted on the shock's doing that. But since he is. . . . He has to be put in a place anyway; is there any reason why he shouldn't carry . . . this along with him?"

"None," I said. Hagar smiled and rose. I stopped her. "Wait a minute. Hagar."

"Yes?"

I don't usually grope for words. I did a little now. "Hagar. Ever since I met you. That dinner. I've wondered."

"Wondered?"

"Whether I hate you or love you."

"And now you know?" There was a smile on her lips. I'd never noticed her lips much before. I'll swear they were never full like that, never so warm-looking.

"Now I know."

"You hate me, of course."

"No."

I moved toward her. She stood still.

I said, "You found what you were looking for. In its damnable way, it's made you a woman. The twitches are gone. You're real and warm."

She didn't avoid my touch. She didn't respond either. She said, "And why should I care what you think?"

I said, "Because I'm what you

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want. I've almost said it before. And then I'd think, 'No, boy. You don't want her enough — not for that.' But now I know. I know a lot of things. I know *why* you killed Willis Wythe. Because you thought you'd found it with him, and then you learned he was innocent. Not a murderer. And you hated him because you had been fooled. But you're not fooled now, Hagar. Because I'm what you want. *I'm the Wythe murderer!*"

The words were coming easier now. They came almost too fast as I rushed on, "Uncle Herman was onto a racket of mine. It was too dangerous. I used the kid's gun — it was lying around the house — and cleared out fast. I worried some when he was convicted. But hell, a man's got to look out for himself. That's what I told Willis last night. That's why he jumped me, why I had to knock him out and leave him there where you found him. I'm it, Baby. I'm your thing. I've carried it in me all these years and now —"

Almost imperceptibly Hagar moved away from me. She stood very straight and her body touched my arm, but it was cold and unyielding.

She said, "You're what I wanted. Past tense. I was a fool. I thought I could know through a man. I never thought, I never knew . . ." The black eyes rested on me with something like pity.

"Goodbye," she said. . . .

When I answered the doorbell I found Lieutenant Kurman. He said, "The alienists are working the old man over."

His voice was perfectly normal now, and I guessed the whisper was a part of the whole ham set-up. "I've come back," he added, "for the murderer."

I deadpanned. "I thought you had already proved from the neck, Lieutenant —"

"Snap judgment," he said. "Sometimes it gets results. But once I thought it over . . . Look: All that removing the neck does is to call attention to the neck. It'd be worth doing only if some vital positive clue . . ."

I let him go on. It was my speech almost word for word and I had to admit I'd underrated the guy. When he was through, I said, "You'll find her in there. And no complications this time. I'm admitting that the prints on her neck are mine."

They argued over me for a while, the sovereign states of California and Iowa. Finally they decided that California had the stronger case if I should decide to retract my confessions — and who trusts a murderer?

That was too bad in a way. It meant the cyanide chamber.

Alonzo wouldn't have approved at all.

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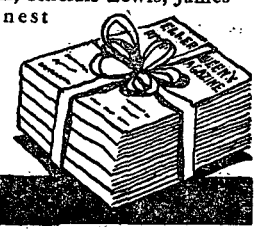

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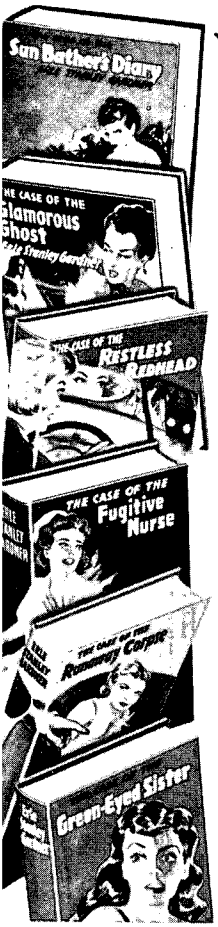
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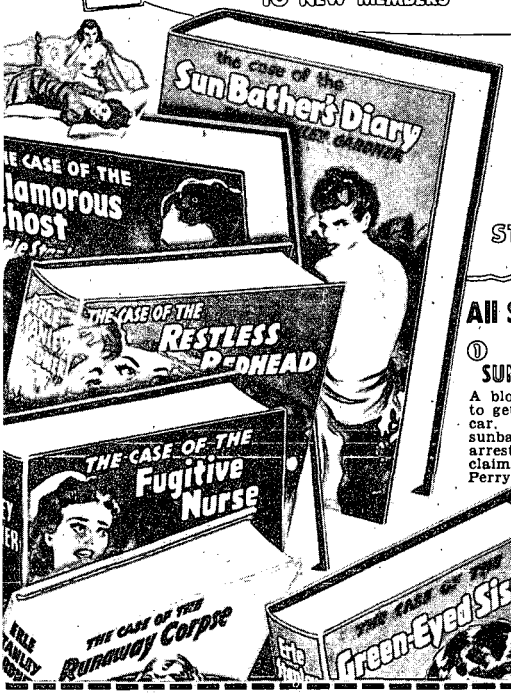
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② **THE CASE OF THE GLAMOROUS GHOST**

Perry's client doesn't remember what happened the night her husband was murdered. She can't recognize her own .38 — the murder weapon. Only two people can clear her. One is missing — the other is *dead!*

③ **THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD**

Mason's client is accused of stealing $40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of *MURDER!* Perry must save her—though he suspects she may be *guilty!*

④ **THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE**

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

⑤ **THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE**

A client hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband. Perry finds *blank* paper! Police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

⑥ **THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER**

Grogan, a blackmailer, wants $20,000 for a piece of evidence against Fritch. Then Fritch is found DEAD! Grogan has an alibi—but not Mason!

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